

Ovid

Katharina Volk

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Ovid

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To Christine

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Preface

When I was an undergraduate and budding Latin major at the University of Munich, my friend Christine and I would meet up in the afternoon at my apartment and read the *Metamorphoses*. Fortified by many pots of tea and provisions from the nearby *Konditorei*, we slowly made our way through Ovid's Latin, moving from the creation of the world to the crime and punishment of Lycaon, the cinematic cataclysm of the flood, Apollo's unsuccessful pursuit of Daphne, Io's bovine metamorphosis, and beyond. We were deeply fascinated by what we read – not only the uncanny tales themselves but also the poet's beautiful and clever turns of phrase – and not a little excited by our own ability to understand and relate so well to something that had been written in a dead language so many centuries before.

Reading Ovid is a joy, and I hope that this book will communicate some of my own love for the poet, enabling readers from many different backgrounds and with many different interests to gain a better understanding and appreciation of his works. To keep the discussion accessible, I quote only sparingly from the original Latin and have instead provided English translations, all of them my own. These lack all poetic aspiration and are intended simply to convey the text's literal meaning.

Since my discussion is not primarily directed at an audience of scholars but at a wider readership, I have not documented critical opinion on each and every point of discussion, as I would have done in a more narrowly academic publication. This does not mean, however, that I have not been greatly influenced by the work of many colleagues. My debts will be obvious to those familiar with the literature; in addition, I list in the chapter "Further Reading" a large number of publications on Ovid that I recommend, as well as titles that have been especially important in shaping my own views.

In writing this book, I have furthermore profited from the expertise and ideas of Caleb Dance, Elaine Fantham, Marco Fantuzzi, Christine

Hehle, Monica Hellström, Bob Kaster, Donald Mastronarde, Brigitte and Peter Volk, Craig Williams, and the anonymous referees for Wiley-Blackwell. Gareth Williams kindly read the entire manuscript and offered numerous suggestions for improvement. My heartfelt thanks go to them all. Of course, all remaining errors are my own.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the editorial team at Wiley-Blackwell, especially Al Bertrand and Sophie Gibson for suggesting to me the idea for this book in the first place and Haze Humbert and Galen Smith for assisting me in seeing it to completion. I am further indebted to the Soprintendenza Speciale per il Patrimonio Storico, Artistico ed Etnoantropologico e per il Polo Museale della Città di Roma, the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna for supplying me with the photographs of three works of art discussed in chapter 8 and to the Stanwood Cockey Lodge Foundation for financial support in the acquisition of these images.

The American Academy in Rome provided me with a congenial setting for three weeks during the final stages of the project. *Mille grazie* first and foremost to Carmela Franklin, the Director, as well as to everyone for the hospitality, intellectual stimulation, and legendary food.

This book is dedicated to Christine, in fond memory of our Ovidian afternoons.

Katharina Volk
New York

Abbreviations for Ovid's Works

<i>Am.</i>	<i>Amores</i> ("Loves")
<i>Ars</i>	<i>Ars amatoria</i> ("Art of Love")
<i>Fast.</i>	<i>Fasti</i> ("The Roman Calendar")
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Heroides</i> ("Heroines")
<i>Med.</i>	<i>Medicamina faciei femineae</i> ("Cosmetics for the Female Face")
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i> ("Transformations")
<i>Pont.</i>	<i>Epistulae ex Ponto</i> ("Letters from the Black Sea")
<i>Rem.</i>	<i>Remedia amoris</i> ("Remedies for Love")
<i>Tr.</i>	<i>Tristia</i> ("Sad Poems")

Introduction

Ovid's Fame

At the end of his *Metamorphoses*, the Roman poet Ovid proudly declares that he has fashioned a work “which neither the wrath of Jupiter nor fire nor sword nor devouring time will be able to destroy” (15.871–2). Even though one day his body will die, his poetry will live on:

Wherever Roman power extends over conquered lands, I will be read by the lips of the people, and – if there is any truth to the prophecies of poets – I will live for all ages through my fame. (877–9)

Ovid died nearly 2,000 years ago, but his prediction has been fulfilled beyond the poet's imagination. In the passage quoted, Ovid merely hopes that his literary reputation will reach as far as the political power of Rome. But the Roman empire has long since collapsed and Latin has ceased to be a world language – and yet Ovid's works are still being read, including in parts of the world that Ovid did not know existed and in languages that were not yet spoken when he wrote his verse.

If the poet's fame has thus indeed endured through all ages, it appears recently to have received a particular boost. In the past thirty years or so, Ovid has become so popular that it is often claimed that we live in a new *aetas Ovidiana* (“Ovidian age,” a term originally coined by the medievalist Ludwig Traube to refer to the 12th and 13th centuries, a period when Ovid was much studied and imitated¹). This trend is apparent not just from the fact that today Ovid is one of the most widely taught Latin authors in schools and universities (an elementary Latin textbook in use

in the United States even undertakes to teach *Latin via Ovid*) and that the number of scholarly publications on the poet has skyrocketed over the last few decades. Even more remarkable is the appeal that Ovid holds for a wider audience, as witnessed, for example, by the interest in poetic translations (such as Ted Hughes's *Tales from Ovid* (1997)), the success of Mary Zimmerman's play *Metamorphoses* (a Broadway hit in 2002), and the appearance of the literary mini-genre of the "Ovid novel" (prominent authors, to be discussed in chapter 8, include David Malouf, Christoph Ransmayr, and Jane Alison).

Why this fascination for Ovid? Those who can read his works in the original may point to the classical beauty of his verse – which is, incidentally, easy enough to make the poet accessible to students early on in their Latin studies. Much of Ovid's work is dedicated to the topic of love and the telling of mythological tales, subjects that modern readers tend to find as engaging as their ancient counterparts, and the fact that the poet treats these themes with his trademark wit and humor makes his texts additionally appealing. Furthermore, the sad fate of the author, who at the height of his success was exiled to a faraway land under mysterious circumstances, continues to elicit both sympathy and speculation.

Perhaps the main reason why late 20th- and early 21st-century readers have found Ovid so congenial, however, is that the poet appears to be so modern – or, rather, postmodern – sharing many of the attitudes and concerns found not only in contemporary academia but in popular culture as well. Distrustful of grand narratives, interested in linguistic structures rather than reality, intertextual, self-referential, and fundamentally ironic, Ovid speaks not only to scholars versed in poststructural theory but also to the kind of wider audience that has come to expect (to take just one example) that even a mainstream movie will contain self-conscious and often humorous allusions to earlier films of the same genre and thus call attention to its status as a work of art. Ovid's prediction of his fame at the conclusion of the *Metamorphoses* is a perfect example of his postmodern playfulness. Just as a moviegoer steeped in cinematic history will be better able to appreciate the allusivity of any new film, a *lector doctus* ("learned reader") of Ovid will be aware that the poet's proud claim to his work's immortality harks back to similar pronouncements by two earlier Latin authors. In the last poem of his third book of *Odes*, Horace (65–8 BCE) declared that he had fashioned a "work more durable than bronze" (3.30.1), whose survival through the ages was to guarantee that the poet, too, would not die but would live on through his fame. Like Ovid after him, Horace linked his undying reputation to the duration of

the Roman empire, stating that he would grow more and more famous “as long as the pontiff walks up to the Capitol together with the silent virgin” (8–9), a reference to the Pontifex Maximus and the Vestal Virgins. Before Horace, already the archaic Latin poet Ennius (3rd–2nd C. BCE) advised his friends not to cry for him after his death since he was not in fact going to die but would “fly, alive, through the lips of men” (*Epigrams*, fr.18 Vahlen = 46.2 Courtney).

In addition to alluding to these two famous moments in earlier Latin poetry, Ovid’s prediction also plays a self-referential game with the reader. The phrase “I will be read by the lips of the people” is a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is literally true any time anyone reads the line – and even more so if the reader reads aloud, as was standard practice in antiquity. Simply by reading his words, we keep Ovid alive.

About This Book

This book is intended to introduce a new generation of readers to a poet who after two millennia still speaks to us. It is written not for classical scholars (though they, too, might find in it points of interest), but for readers of Ovid who would like to know more about what they are reading. Students who approach the poet either in his native Latin or in a translation, scholars in such disciplines as art history and comparative literature, or that elusive category, the “general audience” – all of them will, I hope, discover in these pages ideas and information that will guide and deepen their understanding of Ovid. Given the introductory nature of the book, I will be doing what the Latinist Stephen Hinds warned against in a famous article of 1987:² I will be “generalizing about Ovid,” that is, I will unabashedly make a number of reasonably large claims about the nature of Ovidian poetry. Individual readers may well disagree with individual points, and some Ovidian scholars in particular will have different perspectives on some of the issues discussed. Nevertheless, I believe that the book presents an Ovid who will be easily recognized by both specialists and nonspecialists as the author who piqued their interest in the first place.

A traditional way of introducing readers to a poet’s oeuvre is to discuss each of his or her works in turn. This is the approach taken by most other books on Ovid that are on the market (see the chapter “Further Reading” at the end of the book). I have chosen a different method and, in the discussion that follows, will treat in turn different topics and themes. Though Ovid, in the course of his career, created a series of highly

original works that greatly differ from one another, he also continued to exhibit similar concerns and interests, even as he moved from genre to genre and from one poem to the next. By concentrating on these concerns and interests, I hope to bring out the internal coherence of Ovid's work, while not losing sight of its development over time. Individual poems and passages will still be discussed in some detail, but the stress is on the larger themes that unite the corpus. I am aware that many readers will have experience with, or interest in, only one or a few Ovidian works, but I believe that they, too, will easily be able to follow the discussion and glean the pieces of information of immediate relevance to their purpose. With any luck, such readers will feel inspired to pick up some books by Ovid hitherto unknown to them, while those who approach these pages without any prior knowledge of Ovid will come to realize what they have been missing and will rush to get their hands on a text.

To orient readers and convey the necessary basic information, chapter 1 ("Work") lays out and describes in detail all of Ovid's poems in chronological order, discussing in turn the poet's amatory works (*Amores*, *Heroides*, *Medicamina faciei femineae*, *Ars amatoria*, and *Remedia amoris*), long poems (*Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*), and exile poetry (*Tristia*, *Ibis*, and *Epistulae ex Ponto*). The complementary chapter 2 ("Life") discusses what we know of Ovid's biography, which – as is the case with nearly all ancient authors – does not amount to much. Instead of hard facts about the poet's vita, we have his highly stylized "life," the account of his poetic career that Ovid constructs in the course of his work and that I examine in detail. The chapter ends with a discussion of Ovid's exile and the ways in which the poet transformed this traumatic experience into literature.

Chapter 3 ("Elegy") is concerned with the genre that dominates Ovid's poetic production: with the exception of the *Metamorphoses*, all of his extant works qualify as elegy. After tracing the history of the elegiac genre – with a special focus on the subgenre of Roman love elegy as practiced by Ovid's older contemporaries Gallus, Tibullus, and Propertius – I examine Ovid's uses and transformations of elegy, from his early love poetry to the aetiological *Fasti* and finally the plaintive exile poems. Special attention is given to Ovid's frequent self-referential reflections on his generic choices and to his humorous deconstruction of the code of Roman love elegy in his amatory works.

In chapter 4 ("Myth"), I survey Ovid's employment of myth throughout his oeuvre, focusing in particular on questions of genre and on the *Metamorphoses* as an epic poem, as well as on intertextuality. This leads

to a narratological discussion of storytelling in the *Metamorphoses* and to an exploration of Ovid's treatment of time, a concern evident in many of the poet's works, most notably his calendar poem, the *Fasti*.

While chapters 3 and 4 present a first overview of Ovid's work in its entirety (chapter 3 treats the elegies, chapter 4 gives pride of place to the *Metamorphoses*), the following chapters highlight particular themes. Chapter 5 ("Art") deals with what I view as Ovid's central concern, his pervasive interest in the question of art (Latin *ars*), the aesthetic imitation of reality through language and other media. The chapter discusses the poet's much-maligned use of rhetoric, his depiction of artists in the *Metamorphoses*, and his occasionally shocking propagation of artifice and artificiality.

In chapter 6 ("Women"), I turn to Ovid's treatment of women. The poet's obvious interest in the female sex and his repeated espousing of female points of view have been variously explained as motivated by particular sympathy toward women or otherwise by blatant misogyny. In revisiting the question, I concentrate in particular on Ovid's unusually pronounced "heterosexuality" (in the sense of a privileging of opposite-sex relationships and intercourse) and his awareness of culturally constructed gender roles.

Chapter 7 ("Rome") examines Ovid's interest in and depiction of the city of Rome in his work. A paradigmatically urban poet, Ovid uses contemporary Rome as a backdrop for his erotic teaching in the *Ars amatoria*, celebrates the Roman past in the *Metamorphoses* and especially the *Fasti*, and attempts to conjure up the city he has lost in his exile poems. His relationship to Rome raises the question of his attitude to the emperor Augustus, who fundamentally shaped both the physical city and the life of its inhabitants and who, infamously, exiled Ovid to a place that the poet experienced as a veritable anti-Rome. I discuss mentions of and allusions to Augustus in a variety of Ovid's works, attempting to throw light on the poet's views of Rome's most powerful man.

The following chapter 8 ("Reception") takes a look at some of the many creative reactions to Ovid in Western literature and art. The discussion focuses on depictions of Ovid as a teacher of love in Latin poetry of the Middle Ages; Renaissance and Baroque art inspired by the *Metamorphoses*; and contemporary "Ovid novels" fascinated by the mystery of Ovid's exile. A concluding chapter entitled "Further Reading" provides ample suggestions for readers who wish to pursue their interest in Ovid beyond the covers of this book.

Work

Publius Ovidius Naso was born in 43 BCE in the Italian town of Sulmo (modern Sulmona) but spent most of his adult life in Rome. In 8 CE, he was banished by the emperor Augustus to Tomis (modern Constantza), a town on the shores of the Black Sea in what is today Romania, where he died in 17 or 18 CE. What little else is known about Ovid's life will be the subject of the next chapter, but for the moment, these bare dates may serve as the chronological framework for an examination of the poet's work.

Ovid's poems are notoriously difficult to date, and no attempt will be made here to solve any of the longstanding chronological problems. Roughly speaking, the poet's work can be divided into three phases, treated in turn below. In the first twenty-five years or so of his active career (mid-20s BCE to c. 2 CE), Ovid published a number of poetry collections and shorter works in the elegiac meter, all of which treat, in one way or another, the topic of love. In the following six years up to his exile (2–8 CE), he was working on his two longest poems, the epic *Metamorphoses* and the elegiac *Fasti*. Finally, Ovid produced a number of works in exile, including the collections *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, as well as the curse poem *Ibis*, all in elegiacs. These phases are not clearly distinct: it is quite possible that Ovid began work on the *Metamorphoses* and/or *Fasti* before 2 CE, and it is obvious that he revised at least the latter while in exile. Finally, there are a number of Ovidian works that are lost – most notably the tragedy *Medea* – as well as poems attributed to Ovid that scholars today believe to be inauthentic. These are discussed at the very end of the chapter.

Love Poems

Amores (“Loves”)

In its transmitted form, the *Amores* is a collection in three books of forty-nine elegiac poems in the style of Tibullus and Propertius, in which the male first-person speaker treats his erotic feelings and relationship with a woman whom he calls Corinna. The work is prefaced by a short epigram that informs the reader that there were originally five books but that the author reissued the work in abridged form, making it (thus the poem humorously claims) a less painful read. The fact that the *Amores* underwent these two editions significantly complicates any attempt to establish a chronology for the work’s publication(s), especially since it is unclear whether the five books of the first edition came out together or consecutively and whether or not new poems were added to the second edition.

In *Tr.* 4.10.57–60, Ovid says that his first public poetry reading took place “when [his] beard had been cut once or twice” (58) and that it featured poems about Corinna. This would put the earliest parts of the *Amores* some time in the 20s BCE. Very few of the poems in the surviving three-book edition contain references to datable events: 3.9 mentions the death of the poet Tibullus (19 BCE) and 1.14.45–50 alludes to a Roman victory over the Germanic tribe of the Sygambri (possibly 16 BCE, though hostilities continued and the tribe was finally defeated only in 8 BCE). Intriguing but problematic is poem 2.18, where Ovid refers to a number of his other works as completed or in progress: these include the *Medea* (13–14), the *Heroides* (21–6), and perhaps the *Ars amatoria* (19–20). The last reference is doubtful since some scholars have taken Ovid’s mention of the “arts of tender love” (*artes teneri ... Amoris*, 19) as an allusion not to the *Ars* but to the *Amores* itself. However, if Ovid does mean the *Ars*, datable to c. 1 BCE–2 CE, then poem 2.18 is a very late addition to the *Amores*, no doubt written for the second edition, which must then be placed around the turn of the millennium. It is thus possible that the poet worked on the *Amores*, on and off, for about twenty-five years.

The *Amores* is the last manifestation of the genre of Roman love elegy, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. In keeping with the conventions of the genre, the first-person speaker of the *Amores* is both a lover and a poet of love, that is, an elegist. In addition to appearing in a number of typical elegiac situations (at the dinner party, on his lover’s doorstep, jealous at a rival, enraged at the perfidy of his mistress, etc.), the poet-lover also frequently reflects on his activities as a poet. By

drawing attention to the artificiality of the elegiac scenario (in which a man, overwhelmed by love, pines for an ultimately unattainable, idealized woman) and stressing the more physical aspects of an erotic relationship (including such unromantic incidents as impotence, 3.7, and abortion, 2.13 and 14), Ovid pokes fun at elegy while widening its scope, a tendency that continues in his other amatory works.

Heroides ("Heroines")

The *Heroides* or *Epistulae heroidum* ("Letters of Heroines") are fictional letters in elegiacs, purportedly written by mythological women (and a few men) to their love interests. There are twenty-one such poems that have come down to us under Ovid's name. The first fifteen ("single *Heroides*") are letters by heroines to the men they love, from whom they have been separated (not infrequently having been abandoned) and with whom they wish to be reunited. These letter-writers include such famous literary characters as Penelope, Phaedra, Dido, Ariadne, and Medea, as well as, exceptionally, a historical woman, the poet Sappho, nominal author of *Heroides* 15. The remaining six letters ("double *Heroides*") constitute three pairs, in each of which a man first writes to his female beloved and then receives an answer. The couples involved are Paris and Helen, Leander and Hero, and Acontius and Cydippe.

As noted above, Ovid mentions a few of the single *Heroides* in *Am.* 2.18.21–6, which implies that they were written simultaneously with (parts of) the *Amores*, that is, some time in the last quarter of the 1st century BCE. In the same text (27–34), Ovid tells us that a friend of his by the name of Sabinus composed poems in which he had the male addressees write back to the heroines; thus, for example, Penelope finally received an answer from the wayward Odysseus. It is possible that Sabinus' witty sequel (which does not survive) gave Ovid the idea for the correspondences found in the double *Heroides*. Since Ovid himself never mentions the paired letters (which, treating mythological topics, contain no references to contemporary events), it is impossible to date them, beyond the fact that they must have been written after *Am.* 2.18. On stylistic grounds, scholars often place the double *Heroides* quite late in Ovid's career, and they were perhaps written only during the poet's exile.

A lively debate surrounds the authenticity of some of the *Heroides*. Most often called into question is the letter of Sappho, which is now conventionally referred to as no. 15 of the collection but which has a different manuscript tradition from the remaining twenty letters and has been known only since the 15th century. The double letters, too, have

been suspected as spurious, as have others, particularly those of the single letters not mentioned explicitly in *Am.* 2.18 (to complicate matters, though, that poem *does* refer to a letter by Sappho). Most of the arguments are based on suspicious stylistic and metrical features in the letters in question. The issue will continue to be debated, but it seems to me more likely than not that all twenty-one letters are in fact Ovidian, and I treat them as such in what follows.

Medicamina faciei femineae ("Cosmetics for the Female Face")

With the *Medicamina* Ovid begins his foray into didactic poetry, a genre typically written in hexameters and dedicated, at least ostensibly, to teaching either a practical skill (such as agriculture in Vergil's *Georgics*) or a theoretical field of knowledge (such as Epicurean physics in Lucretius' *De rerum natura*). Ovid, by contrast, dispenses his instructions in elegiacs and treats a suitably elegiac topic: a woman's cosmetics. The poem exists today only in fragmentary form, breaking off after line 100. Half of what we have is taken up by a proem in which Ovid, addressing his female audience, celebrates the concept of *cultus* ("cultivation, sophistication") that underlies not only female adornment, but culture in general. The rest of the text consists of very technical "recipes" for various skin treatments and facial creams. Since the *Medicamina* is mentioned in *Ars* 3 (205–8), it must have been written before that book and most likely before the entire *Ars*.

Ars amatoria ("Art of Love")

If in the *Medicamina*, Ovid was trying out his original combination of a didactic format with elegiac meter and subject matter, he perfected this new hybrid genre in the *Ars*. Roman love elegy, including Ovid's *Amores*, merely *describes* the poet-lover's often painful amatory experiences. By contrast, the new "Art of Love" ambitiously undertakes to *teach* elegiac love – and teach it in such a way that it is no longer painful. In Books 1 and 2, Ovid addresses himself to the young men of Rome, demonstrating that a satisfactory relationship can be achieved in three easy steps: first the man must find a woman to love; then he must seduce her; and finally he must take steps for their love to last for an extended period of time. The teacher's instructions are hands-on: he enumerates auspicious pick-up places throughout the city of Rome, builds up his students' confidence before they approach their girls, and generally provides advice on everything from the writing of love letters and the giving of gifts to successful

behavior in the bedroom. At the end of Book 2, the young men have secured their female lovers and celebrate their teacher Ovid as the master of his craft.

At this point, Ovid declares that the “tender girls” (2.745), too, are asking for his advice and, ostensibly out of a sense of fairness, launches into his third book, which contains instructions for the women. It has traditionally been assumed that after the first two books were published and met with success, Ovid conceived of Book 3 as a funny sequel that was to treat the material of the male-centered preceding books from a female perspective. It is, however, also possible that the poet planned the three books as a unit from the start and that the claim that Book 3 is an afterthought, undertaken only at the urging of the women themselves, is but a humorous fiction. Book 3 itself harks back to the *Medicamina* in recommending *cultus* to the women and offers plentiful advice on such topics as clothing and hairstyles. While Ovid clearly expects his female students to take a less active role than the males in the pursuit of their love interests, he is still training them to be serious players who know how to manipulate men for their own purposes.

The first book of the *Arts* contains references to two contemporary events that allow us to date the work unusually closely. In 171–6, Ovid mentions as a recent occurrence a mock naval battle that Augustus staged in 2 BCE, and in 177–228, he discusses the imminent Parthian campaign of the emperor’s grandson Gaius Caesar, who departed for the east in 1 BCE. At least the first two books were thus presumably published in late 2 or early 1 BCE. If Book 3 was part of the original plan, it belongs to the same time; if not, it probably appeared shortly thereafter.

Remedia amoris (“Remedies for Love”)

As we have seen, already in *Arts* 3, Ovid delights in humorously reversing some of the teaching of his two preceding books. In the *Remedia*, Ovid’s last work of amatory didactic, the poet executes a further about-face. Having taught the art of love, Ovid now offers advice on how to free oneself from any unwanted emotions and attractions. As is apparent from the title, the poet here presents himself as a doctor confident of healing his patients of the “disease” of love (a traditional metaphor much used in Roman love elegy). While still humorous in tone, the book’s advice (such as not to become entangled in an unhealthy relationship in the first place, to distract oneself through activity, and to effect a clean but non-hostile breakup) is generally more sober and even finds parallels in the ethical teachings of contemporary philosophy.

In the context of advising the lovesick student to join the army to take his mind off his beloved, Ovid again mentions Gaius Caesar, who at this point has arrived in Parthia and is presented as poised for battle (155–6). However, rather than fighting the Parthians, the actual Gaius reached a diplomatic settlement with them in 2 CE. Since Ovid was apparently not yet aware of this when he wrote his lines, we may conjecture that he completed the *Remedia* and thus his amatory oeuvre by early 2 CE.

Long Poems

Metamorphoses (“Transformations”)

After Ovid’s comparatively short elegiac works, the *Metamorphoses*, a hexametric epic in fifteen books, presents a striking departure. As the poet announces in the proem, the work’s topic is “shapes changed into new bodies” (1.1–2), that is, myths of transformation. Metamorphosis had been a favorite subject of Greek literature, and such learned works as the *Heteroionumena* (“Changes”) of Nicander (2nd C. BCE) may have served as the Roman poet’s sources. However, Ovid’s project is considerably more ambitious than any previous catalogue of transformations. At the end of the proem, he asks the gods to direct his song “from the first beginning of the world to my own times” (1.3–4), highlighting the universal scope of a poem that purports to cover metamorphoses that took place from the creation of the cosmos (described at the beginning of Book 1) all the way to the reigns of Julius Caesar and Augustus (mentioned at the end of Book 15).

Most of Ovid’s material is what we would call mythological (though note that for the ancients, the distinction between myth and history was not always clearly drawn, and a story like that of Aeneas might well be considered either), and in the course of the work, the poet manages to cover most major Greco-Roman myths (such as the Trojan War and the exploits of Hercules) and a multitude of less prominent ones. The *Metamorphoses* is thus an excellent source for ancient myth and was used as a veritable mythological handbook by writers and artists throughout Western cultural history (see further chapter 8 on the reception of Ovid in Renaissance and Baroque art). The poem is divided into three blocks of five books each, a structure that corresponds to the chronological progression of the work’s subject matter. Books 1–5 treat exploits of the gods, Books 6–10 recount the adventures of heroes, and Books 11–15 tell tales about mere men.

In writing the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid faced the challenge of treating a large number of individual stories (there are about 250) while making them all part of an overarching narrative. He achieved this through a number of methods, including varying the length and focus of individual tales (some stories are alluded to in a few words, others told for hundreds of lines), enclosing stories within stories through the use of internal narrators (about a third of the text consists in embedded narrative), and devising ingenious transitions from story to story. While it is thus possible to mine the *Metamorphoses* for particular myths or read individual episodes out of context, the full extent of Ovid's virtuosity becomes apparent only to those who make their way through the poem from beginning to end.

Not all stories in the *Metamorphoses* contain actual metamorphoses, and a few of the transformations recounted seem to be only tenuously related to the tales in which they appear. Nevertheless, metamorphosis is the central theme of the poem, and Ovid delights in describing in detail many of the uncanny transformations (mostly of human beings into animals or plants) that occur in the course of his narrative. The significance of metamorphosis is manifold. First, transformation myths serve as an explanation for why the world is the way it is today (along the lines of "how the leopard got his spots"), attesting to the great interest the Greeks and Romans took in aetiology (from Greek *aition*, "(story of) origin"). Second, metamorphoses often bring out an inherent trait in the character transformed, such as when the "wolfish" Lycaon is actually changed into a wolf in Book 1. In a way, metamorphosis is thus but metaphor turned real, which makes the world of the *Metamorphoses* a realm where language becomes alive. Finally, the never-ending stream of transformations in the poem conveys the idea of an unstable world that is in continuous flux. This view finds its expression in the speech of the philosopher Pythagoras, which takes up a large part of Book 15 (75–478). Though in many ways a ridiculous character, Pythagoras surely captures some of the spirit of the poem in which he appears when he remarks that, as a universal rule, "nothing retains its shape" (252).

Since myth was the primary subject of Greek and Latin literature, a work that recounts a multitude of mythological stories must necessarily engage with a multitude of literary predecessors. As a result, the *Metamorphoses* is a highly intertextual poem that interacts in original ways with many sources in many genres, including Homer, Greek tragedy, and Hellenistic epyllion (short epic). Of particular interest is Ovid's relationship to Vergil. Already by Ovid's time, the *Aeneid* was considered *the*

classic Roman epic, and the younger poet (like many Latin epic writers after him) felt the need to position his own work creatively in relation to the master. Not only is the *Metamorphoses* as a whole a decidedly un-Vergilian epic (some scholars have even called it anti-Vergilian), but Ovid also presents a most idiosyncratic rewriting of the *Aeneid* in his own treatment of the story of Aeneas in 13.623–14.608.

In *Tr.* 1.7, Ovid claims that when he was banished, the *Metamorphoses* was as yet unfinished and that he therefore burned the poem before his departure. The text survived, however; as the poet remarks (no doubt tongue in cheek), “I guess it existed in numerous copies” (*Tr.* 1.7.24). Both the burning of the poem (if it ever happened) and the reference to its supposedly unfinished state appear to be attempts on the part of Ovid to further align himself with Vergil, who famously (if unsuccessfully) asked for the *Aeneid* to be destroyed after his death on account of its lack of a final hand. In the case of the *Metamorphoses*, it is possible that Ovid further revised the work in exile; the final product certainly looks finished to us.

Fasti (“The Roman Calendar”)

If, despite Ovid’s claims, we are unable to spot imperfections in the *Metamorphoses*, the case is different with the *Fasti*. In *Tr.* 2.549–50, the poet maintains to have written twelve books of this work. However, only six have come down to us, with no evidence that the poem’s would-be second half ever existed. While it is possible that the books were lost in the process of textual transmission, it is more likely that Ovid deliberately exaggerated (his words in *Tristia* 2 are addressed to Augustus, to whom he originally dedicated the poem, 551–2) and either never got around to finishing the work or, as some scholars have suggested, simply decided not to pursue it further.

Also unlike in the case of the *Metamorphoses*, there are clear indications that Ovid revised the *Fasti* in exile. In 4.81–4, he explicitly refers to his place of banishment, lamenting how far away it is from his hometown of Sulmo. Furthermore, Book 1 in particular shows obvious signs of having been reworked after the death of Augustus in 14 CE. Ovid apparently decided that it would be more useful if the work were addressed to a living member of the imperial family and – in addition to making a few other changes to reflect the changed political situation – wrote a new proem, in which he dedicated the *Fasti* to the prince Germanicus. Many scholars believe that part of what is now the introduction to Book 2 once belonged to the original first proem, written when the *Fasti* was still

intended for Augustus. Ovid apparently never updated the entire work; thus, even leaving aside the lack of the last six books, the poem may be considered unfinished.

The Latin term *fasti* (from (*dies*) *fastus*, “day on which business may be transacted”) refers to a list of annually recurring holidays and other anniversaries, that is, more or less what we would call a (religious) calendar. The Romans had inscriptional *fasti* that listed the days of each month, indicating the significance that attached to them; these, as well as written commentaries that further explained the meaning and rituals of each date, were no doubt important sources for Ovid’s poem. Especially after the reform of Julius Caesar in 46 BCE, the calendar became a “hot topic” at Rome. Antiquarians aimed at uncovering the origins of the ancient rites and customs enshrined in the *fasti*, while Augustus ingeniously availed himself of the calendar as a means of propaganda, inserting among the old festivals new holidays that celebrated his own achievements and those of family members. In its linking of hallowed antiquity and contemporary ideology, the calendar was a perfect expression of Roman identity in the Augustan age and as such a promising, if challenging, topic for a poem.

Ovid’s *Fasti* dedicates one book to each month of the calendar, which means that we have his treatment of January through June. After a proem, each book discusses individual (though not all) days of the month in order, following a principle of variation: some dates receive but short notice in a verse or two, while others are treated at considerable length. The content, too, is varied: in addition to longstanding religious festivals and new Augustan holidays, Ovid mentions the risings and settings of constellations (a time-honored method of tracking the changing seasons) and, in the context of explicating the meaning of each day, variously recounts myths, reconstructs historical events, provides etymologies, gives weather forecasts, and discusses the history and technicalities of the Roman calendar itself.

Despite the genuinely Roman subject matter, the main literary influence on the *Fasti* is the *Aetia* (“Origins”) of the Hellenistic poet Callimachus (3rd C. BCE). In this poem, Callimachus – whose work and poetic principles had an enormous influence on Latin literature more generally – explains the origins of a number of obscure Greek religious customs; similarly, Ovid in the *Fasti* discusses the aetiology of Roman religious practices, thus taking on the role of a Roman Callimachus. In doing so, he is following the lead of Propertius, who in his fourth book of elegies had already included a number of aetiological poems on Roman themes, in avowed imitation of Callimachus. Like the *Aetia*, and like

Propertius' Callimachean experiment, the *Fasti* is written in elegiacs, which affords Ovid the opportunity for self-referential reflection on the questionable appropriateness of this meter for some of the lofty patriotic topics that he treats.

In Callimachus' *Aetia*, we observe the poet as he gathers information about his various objects of interest, engaging in conversations first with the Muses (Books 1 and 2) and then with a number of individual interlocutors (Books 3 and 4). Ovid adopts and further develops this format, presenting himself throughout the *Fasti* as a researcher into the Roman calendar, one who interviews a wide variety of informants, from gods and the Muses to an old Roman woman and a man sitting next to the poet in the theater. The *Fasti* is thus not just a poem about the Roman calendar, but very much a poem about the process of composing a poem about the Roman calendar. As the poet learns in the course of his research, the truth about the origins, names, and meanings of the manifold religious and other traditions recorded in the calendar is far from easy to uncover since the researcher has to contend with multiple explanations and possibly biased informants. The resultant uncertainty is most clearly, and amusingly, expressed in the proems to Books 5 and 6, where first the Muses cannot agree on the etymology of the month of May and then three goddesses nearly come to blows when quarreling over the meaning of June.

Exile Poems

Tristia ("Sad Poems") and *Epistulae ex Ponto* ("Letters from the Black Sea")

Although the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* are separate works composed at different stages during Ovid's exile, they are similar enough in tone and subject matter to be usefully treated together. Ovid wrote the five books of *Tristia* over the first years of his exile (8–12 CE) and published *Epistulae ex Ponto* 1–3 jointly in 12 or 13 CE; the fourth and final book of the latter work (which contains references to the death of Augustus in 14 CE) may have been made public only after the poet's death. Both works are collections of individual elegies (there are fifty poems in the *Tristia*, forty-six in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*), nearly all of which are addressed to friends, family members, and other people in Rome. In the *Tristia*, Ovid does not name his addressees, purportedly to protect them from negative repercussions; this policy is abandoned in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, which are more explicitly styled as actual letters.

The theme of both works may be largely defined as Ovid's experiences in exile. In the course of the poems, the poet constructs a narrative of how and why he was banished, how he traveled to the Black Sea, and how he is now living in Tomis. The reason and circumstances of his exile are alluded to throughout the collection: Ovid famously – and cryptically – blames *carmen et error* (“a poem and a mistake,” *Tr.* 2.207) for his having incurred Augustus' displeasure. He identifies the *carmen* as the *Ars amatoria* but only hints at the nature of the *error* (which scholars have suspected to be the main cause of his banishment; see the discussion in the next chapter), ostensibly to spare the emperor's feelings. While Ovid's departure from Rome and journey to Tomis are the topic of *Tristia* 1, the second book of the *Tristia* consists of one single long poem addressed to Augustus, in which Ovid defends the *Ars*. The rest of his exilic work is dedicated to describing and reflecting on his situation as an exile.

Ovid presents Tomis as a place at the edges of the inhabited earth, in all aspects as far removed from Rome – the center of the poet's universe – as can be imagined. The climate is harsh, the area is constantly threatened by barbarian invasions, and the natives lack all culture and sophistication. Scholars have pointed out that this picture cannot be realistic: the modern city of Constantza is in fact a seaside resort, and ancient Tomis had been a colony of the Greek city Miletus and remained a Hellenized town. Ovid's depiction of his place of exile as supremely desolate and dangerous owes much to literary depictions of such semi-mythical, faraway peoples as the Scythians. His deliberate overdramatization of the situation is no doubt intended to serve not only poetic but also practical purposes and ultimately to induce Augustus to recall the poet to Rome or at least change the place of his exile.

Separated from Rome, Ovid nostalgically conjures up the city in his poetry, imagining its topography and such urban events as the military triumphs of members of the imperial family. His most important means of keeping up a connection with the world from which he has been expelled is his relationships to his friends and to his wife, connections that he reflects on, and actively maintains, by way of his poems. He reminds his addressees of their past friendship, praises them for their faithfulness or otherwise enjoins them to stay loyal, and implores them to intercede with the emperor on his behalf. Particularly emotional are his appeals to his wife, who stayed behind in Rome in order to protect Ovid's interests there. While the poet expresses his longing for her and celebrates her devotion, he also grows increasingly desperate as her efforts at having his banishment revoked meet with no success.

A major topic of the exile poetry is poetry itself. Ovid comes back again and again to his ambivalent relationship to the Muses: on the one hand, it was his poetry (specifically the *Ars amatoria*) that ruined him; on the other hand, he seems to be unable to stop composing verse, which at the very least offers comfort and distraction. However (he explains), just like his fortunes, his poetry, too, has changed. No longer interested in fame, he now writes for the practical purpose of bringing about his return to Rome. If his work seems different, this is because it reflects his new situation: since the author is sad, his verse is as well (witness the title *Tristia*), and since his life in Tomis is monotonous, his poems also keep repeating the same few themes. Even worse, because Ovid is removed from the culture of Rome, lacks a library and a sophisticated audience, and is so depressed that he is beyond caring, his poetry has deteriorated to the extent that the poet is no longer sure even of his Latin, living, as it were, in linguistic exile as well. This motif of decline and alienation reaches its climax in one of Ovid's latest poems from exile (*Pont.* 4.13), in which the poet, who has meanwhile learned the language of his fellow Tomitans, announces that he has composed his own poem in Getic (19–22).

Readers used to take seriously Ovid's claim of poetic deterioration, and the exile poems for a long time suffered from a correspondingly bad reputation. More recently, though, scholars have not only demonstrated that the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* show no signs that Ovid's talent was fading, but also begun to interpret the poet's claims to the contrary as part of a literary strategy. Over the course of the two collections, Ovid creates his own story of his exile, a powerful and highly stylized tale that – given the lack of other historical sources – has become for us the canonical version of this tragic turn in the author's life.

Ibis

Ovid's remaining work from exile is the curious *Ibis*, an elegiac poem of 642 lines in which the poet curses an unnamed former friend of his who has turned traitor, maligning Ovid at Rome and attempting to profit from his exile. The poem must have been written before 12 CE (lines 1–2 imply that the author is not yet fifty-five years old) and thus falls in the same period as the *Tristia*. The "victim" has not been satisfactorily identified, and it is perhaps more likely that Ovid did not have a specific individual in mind and rather constructed "Ibis" as a kind of model foe.

As the poet explicitly states (53–8), the work is modeled on a poem of Callimachus with the same title (the pseudonym Ibis refers to the bird

of the same name, considered disgusting for its supposed habit of using its beak to insert water into its anus in order to purge itself). Since this work is lost, it is unclear how closely Ovid followed his model. His poem is divided into two parts: in lines 1–248, the poet utters a general curse against Ibis, which is followed in 249–642 by a series of what Ovid calls *historiae caecae* (“obscure stories,” 55), that is, riddling references to gruesome myths, whose disasters and calamities Ovid wishes on Ibis. To choose one of the least obscure examples, the poet curses Ibis to be torn to pieces like Pentheus: “or, rent apart, may you be scattered in the woods by the hands of your family members, just as at Thebes the snake’s grandson was scattered” (531–2; note the learned allusion to the origins of the Thebans in the dragon’s teeth sown by Cadmus). The text is presented as a tour-de-force performance on the part of its first-person speaker, the poet, who keeps up the enraged denouncement of his victim for hundreds of lines, coming up with more and more fantastic punishments before closing with the warning that, unless Ibis mends his ways, the poem will have been nothing but a short prelude to more potent curses to come.

Lost and Spurious Poems

It is a sobering fact that the vast majority of literary works from ancient Greece and Rome will remain forever unknown to us, having been lost in the hazardous process of textual transmission from antiquity to the modern period. Ovid has fared much better than many other authors (for example, only about ten lines survive of the celebrated poems of the first Roman love elegist, Gallus), but even his oeuvre has not come down to us intact. Most regrettable is the loss of his tragedy *Medea*, which the poet alludes to in *Am.* 2.18 and which later authors such as Seneca the Elder, Tacitus, and Quintilian mention as well. Two short fragments of the play survive, both apparently taken from speeches of Medea herself.

Ovid is also credited with having produced a translation of the *Phaenomena* (“Visible Signs”) of the Hellenistic poet Aratus (3rd C. BCE), two short fragments of which are quoted in later sources. Aratus’ poem, a description of the constellations, was exceedingly popular in Rome and had been translated into Latin by Cicero; Ovid’s contemporary Germanicus, the dedicatee of the *Fasti*, produced a version as well. That Ovid would have participated in this Roman craze for Aratus is not surprising, and the risings and settings of constellations and star myths of the *Fasti* further attest to his interest in astronomical material.

If some of Ovid's works are thus lost, we are in possession of other poems that were attributed to the poet, either already in antiquity or in the medieval manuscripts, but that most modern scholars believe to be inauthentic. The most prominent of these are the *Halieutica* ("The Art of Fishing"), the *Nux* ("The Walnut Tree"), and the *Consolatio ad Liviam* ("Consolation of Livia"). The *Halieutica* is a fragment of 134 hexameters that mostly discusses the innate ability of various types of fish to protect themselves against predators and the tricks fishermen need to use if they want to catch them nonetheless. The *Nux* is an elegy in 182 lines in which a wayside walnut tree complains about the people who pelt it with stones in order to gather its nuts. Finally, in the *Consolatio ad Liviam*, the poem's speaker comforts the empress Livia over the death of her son Drusus (9 BCE). Reasons to consider these works spurious include metrical and linguistic anomalies, though the *Halieutica* in particular also has its defenders, who believe it to be Ovidian after all.

While the following discussion will not take account of the poems discussed in the previous paragraph, it is important to be aware that in dealing with texts that are 2,000 years old, there is no absolute certainty that what we are reading was actually written as such by the author in question. As mentioned above, some of the *Heroides* have been suspected of being inauthentic; the *Fasti* (if not the *Metamorphoses*) appears to be unfinished; and supposed revisions and second editions complicate matters. In addition, since these works survived, until the arrival of printing, by being copied and recopied by hand, numerous errors have crept in, many of which are easily spotted and corrected but some of which no doubt persist undetected. As the next chapter will show, we have to rely more or less entirely on Ovid's works in order to gain a sense of Ovid the man; while we have his words, his person remains elusive. However, it is worth bearing in mind that even the words that we have are always only an approximation (however good) of what Ovid himself must actually have written.

2

Life

What do we know about Ovid's life, and how do we know it? Unlike in the case of some Greek and Roman authors, we do not have an ancient biography, and almost no contemporary sources mention the poet. The sole exception is Seneca the Elder, the father of the more famous philosopher of the same name. Seneca was a few years older than Ovid and apparently met the poet when both men were receiving their rhetorical training in the declamation schools of Rome. In his old age (long after Ovid's death), Seneca compiled extended memoirs of orators and speeches that he had heard and in this context mentions his former acquaintance, discussing Ovid's rhetorical abilities and predilections and telling a few anecdotes that nicely illustrate the poet's talent, his propensity to excess, and his cocky self-assurance.

Seneca thus presents an interesting source, but he tells us next to nothing about Ovid's biography, for which we have to rely entirely on the poet himself. Given that, with the exception of the *Heroides*, all of Ovid's extant works are "about Ovid," that is, feature a first-person speaker who is identified with the poet, we have a wealth of autobiographical statements. Especially useful in this context is *Tr.* 4.10, which is the kind of poem that classical scholars call a *sphragis*, that is, a "seal" or signature at the end of a work (in this case the fourth book of the *Tristia*) in which the poet identifies himself. *Tr.* 4.10 is a veritable autobiography and the most important source for Ovid's life.

Still, using the poet's own words to reconstruct his biography is obviously a risky undertaking. The person – or, to use a critical term, the persona – who says "I" in the poems, though often explicitly identified with Ovid, is clearly not the historical Ovid but a literary construct, and

while we may wish to take certain references to his life as historical truth, we should be skeptical of others. For example, scholars are usually happy to accept as a fact that Ovid – as he tells us in *Tr.* 4.10.34 – held an administrative post as one of the *tresviri* (“Board of Three”) when he was a young man; by contrast, few believe that he had sex with his girlfriend Corinna nine times in a single night, as he proudly claims in *Am.* 3.7.25–6. In reading the poet’s statements about himself, we thus have to make critical choices and decide what counts as a true biographical fact and what does not. In many cases, the answer may appear obvious, though ultimately there is no fail-safe approach to the question, and we may end up too gullible about some points of information and too resistant to others. Who knows – perhaps Ovid’s stint on the *tresviri* is just a fiction while the multiple orgasms actually took place!

Ovid himself is highly conscious of how his intratextual persona both is and is not like himself and how this game of near-identity can be played both ways. At many places throughout his oeuvre, the poet claims that his poetry is but a mirror of his life. In the *Amores*, he presents himself as “Naso, the poet of my own wantonness” (2.1.2) and claims (in keeping with the conventions of Roman love elegy) that his verse simply reflects his own experiences as a lover. Similarly, in the exile poetry, he maintains that his mournful verse expresses his mournful state and that the dramatic events of his life have become his subject matter (*Tr.* 5.1.5–6 and 9–10). As he sums things up in *Pont.* 3.9.35–6: “When I was happy, I sang happy songs; being sad, I sing sad ones; each circumstance fits its type of poetry.”

However, on occasion Ovid takes the opposite line, arguing that his poetry – especially the *Ars amatoria* – has nothing to do with his life. He thus tells Augustus in *Tristia* 2 that “my character is different from my song (my life is chaste, my Muse a jokester)” (353–4) and goes on to argue that it would be absurd to assume that the disposition of poets is mirrored in their work: otherwise, the authors of tragedies would all be fierce, those of comedies would be fun-loving party-goers, and those of epics would be prone to fighting (359–60).

The tension between viewing poetry as autobiographical and regarding it as purely fictional is exploited to amusing effect in *Am.* 3.12. There, Ovid complains that through his elegies, his girlfriend Corinna has become too famous, with the result that she is now being pursued by other men. How did this happen? Don’t people know that one is not supposed to take a poet’s word for it, that all poetry is a product of the imagination and far removed from reality? Ovid was counting on his audience to follow the normal rules of interpretation and regard his

Corinna as a fiction. Now, however, the poet must reproach his readers for their gullibility, stating bitterly that “your credulity is harming me” (44). The joke, of course, is that, contrary to all poetic convention, there is in fact a real Corinna – or so Ovid would have us believe.

In his work, Ovid the author creates the character of Ovid the persona, a figure who shares many characteristics with his creator but remains a character in his own right. Since this persona shows up in nearly all of Ovid’s poems and typically receives a fair amount of attention, it is possible to read his work as telling what I call the “story of Ovid,” that is, the constructed biography of its poet. Extracting hard historical facts from the Ovidian corpus is difficult and always fraught with methodological uncertainty; by contrast, reading the story of Ovid as a work of fiction, without worrying about its relation to reality, is comparatively easy. In what follows, I will first attend to what we can extract from his works of the historical Ovid’s biography and only then to the life of his persona. Toward the end of the chapter (and the end of Ovid’s life), this approach of keeping the two narratives separate will, however, run into difficulties. As we will see, once we get to Ovid’s exile, the strands of the poet’s extra- and intratextual lives become more and more difficult to disentangle.

Ovid’s Biography

As already mentioned, most of the information about Ovid’s life comes from *Tr.* 4.10, with some additional pieces found in the other exile poems and in the *Fasti* (the line references in what follows are to these minor sources; information from *Tr.* 4.10 is not explicitly indicated as such). The poet was born on March 20, 43 BC in Sulmo, a small town about ninety miles north of Rome in the Abruzzi mountains, an area inhabited by the Italian tribe of the Paeligni. Like his father before him, Ovid belonged to the equestrian order, the second-highest class (after the senators) in the highly stratified society of ancient Rome. This implies that the family must have been well off. Together with his beloved older brother, who died at the age of twenty, Ovid was educated in the capital, receiving legal and rhetorical training that was meant to prepare him for a political career. As we have seen, he did serve on a “Board of Three,” though it is not entirely clear whether this was the *tresviri capitales*, charged with meting out punishments for capital offenses, or the *tresviri monetales*, concerned with the running of the mint. Whatever the case may be, Ovid subsequently decided not to pursue the regular sequence

of major magistracies, which would have led him to the Senate, and instead dedicated himself to his poetry. Nevertheless, he later held at least one further minor administrative post (*Fast.* 4.383–4) and apparently also served as a judge in a number of different courts (*Tr.* 2.93–6; *Pont.* 3.5.23–4).

Like many upper-class young Romans, Ovid spent a period of time studying in Greece (in his case, Athens) and also visited Asia Minor and Sicily (*Tr.* 1.2.77–8; *Pont.* 2.10.21–42). Otherwise, he apparently mostly stayed in Rome, where he consorted with the fashionable poets of the day; he mentions Horace and Propertius, among others, while regretting that he came too late to properly get to know Vergil and Tibullus (both died in 19 BCE). It is possible that Ovid was a protégé of Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus (in the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, he is still friendly with Messalla's sons Messalinus and Cotta), an aristocrat who presided over a group of literati that included Tibullus. Messalla thus acted as a promoter of poetry similar to Maecenas, the more famous patron of Propertius, Vergil, and Horace. As Ovid mentions numerous times in his work, his own poems quickly met with success and made him famous in the literary circles of Rome.

After two unsuccessful marriages (divorce was easy and commonplace in ancient Rome), Ovid married the woman to whom he would remain attached until the end of his life and whom he entrusted with the task of representing his concerns at Rome when he went into exile. This union linked the poet to the upper echelons of society: his wife had connections to the house of Paullus Fabius Maximus, a friend of Augustus who became one of Ovid's most powerful patrons and whose wife Marcia, the cousin of Augustus, was close not only to Ovid's wife but also to the empress Livia (esp. *Pont.* 1.2.136–40). However, all later attempts on Ovid's part to make use of the Maximus-Marcia connection to get himself recalled from exile failed (and Maximus, like Augustus, died in 14 CE).

Ovid had a daughter, most likely from his second marriage, who was married twice – the second time to a senator (cf. *Tr.* 1.3.19 and Seneca, *On the Constancy of the Wise* 17.1) – and who had two children. The poet was also close to his stepdaughter, the issue of an earlier marriage of his third wife and apparently a poet in her own right (Ovid addresses her in *Tr.* 3.7 as “Perilla,” which violates his policy of not naming his addressees in the *Tristia* and which may or may not be a pseudonym); she, too, went on to marry a senator (*Pont.* 4.8.11–12). The advantageous marriages of the two women attest to the family's upward social mobility. Ovid's own parents died at a ripe old age but – as he notes with relief – before their son was banished in 8 CE.

The reasons and circumstances of Ovid's exile will concern us in the last section of this chapter. However, from what we can glean from the autobiographical references in his work, when the disaster hit, not only was Ovid a popular poet, but – despite his rejection of a political career – he had risen within society and must have been on perfectly good footing with the Augustan regime, as witnessed by his connections to such families as those of Messalla and Maximus and by his administrative and legal service. While we thus end up with the picture of a successful author and citizen, we know next to nothing about the details of the first fifty years of Ovid's life, of his personal relationships, or indeed of his artistic development. About the first two, we will remain forever ignorant. For a version – however stylized – of the last, we need to turn to the narrative of the poet's persona.

The Story of Ovid

In *Tr.* 4.10, Ovid leads up to his decision to give up his political career by describing how already as a boy, he felt drawn to poetry (19–20). When his father noticed the young Ovid's inclinations, he discouraged him from such a “useless pursuit” (21), reminding his son that “not even Homer left behind riches” (22). Impressed by this argument, Ovid resolved to abandon poetry and henceforth write only in prose. However, “of its own accord, my song found its proper meter, and whatever I attempted to say was a verse” (25–6).

While this story can be read as either a humorous comment on the wunderkind who could speak only in meter or a more serious tale of the divine inspiration that miraculously transformed the boy's utterances, it is clearly meant to show that Ovid was destined to be a poet and thus to provide an explanation for how the rest of his life played out. In all of Ovid's poems in which he himself figures as a speaker, his persona is first and foremost a poet and reflects at length on his own poetry and its development. Let us follow this story through the poet's work.

At the beginning of Ovid's first collection, in the first poem of the *Amores*, we already find the poet in the process of composing a song. As Ovid tells us, he is “preparing to sing of arms and violent wars in weighty verse” (*Am.* 1.1.1–2), that is, to write an epic poem in hexameters, the meter typical of the genre. However, this project comes to nothing when Cupid (Latin *Amor*, “Love”) appears and steals a metrical foot from Ovid's second verse, thus turning it into a pentameter and reconfiguring

the poet's epic into elegy (for a more detailed discussion of the elegiac meter, see the next chapter). The poet protests, arguing that Cupid has no jurisdiction over verse and pointing out that he himself lacks a subject matter for elegy: the meter is used for love poetry, but Ovid is not currently in love. Upon hearing this, Cupid takes out a his bow and arrows and shoots Ovid in the heart, proclaiming, "Here you have a subject to sing about, poet!" (24). This settles the matter: Ovid, now in love, has become a writer of elegy and for the rest of the *Amores* will be talking about his amatory experiences and the poetry they inspire.

We will return to this pivotal scene a number of times in the book. What is important for the moment is that we are here made to witness a decisive moment in the poet's career, that is, in the fictional story of Ovid that the poet constructs over the course of his work. What is particularly striking about it is that Ovid becomes an elegist *before* he becomes a lover. It is a defining trope of love poetry (and one much used by Ovid's elegiac predecessors) that it is the poet's feelings that cause him to write. However, Ovid is already (willy-nilly) writing elegy; his love is but an afterthought. This artificial setup provides one reason why even very literal-minded readers have hesitated to take any of the events and experiences described in the *Amores* as autobiographical: the situations in which the persona finds himself, and the ups and downs of his relationship with Corinna, are typical features of the elegiac genre that give no signs of having been derived from a lived reality. While the other great Roman elegists, Tibullus and Propertius, address a number of friends and patrons in their poems and thus at least create the impression that their love affairs are anchored in Roman reality (Propertius even alludes bitterly to the ongoing Civil War), Ovid mentions next to no extraliterary figures and speaks primarily to his beloved – often called Corinna but sometimes just *puella* ("girl"), which leaves it unclear whether he is always envisaging the same woman – and other elegiac stock figures, such as his mistress's maidservant and doorkeeper. Of course it is likely that the historical Ovid was in love at some point or other in his life and that his experience influenced his poetry. However, any such real-life component is irrecoverable, and the *Amores* is not a chronicle of Ovid's misspent youth, but the story of the adventures of Ovid's persona in the literary world of elegy.

While the majority of the poems of the *Amores* show Ovid in various amatory situations, a few are concerned specifically with his poetry. These are strategically placed at the beginnings and ends of books in the clearly very carefully planned three-book edition. Thus, in the last poem of Book 1, Ovid gives a disdainful answer to *Livor*, the personification of Envy,

who blames the poet for wasting his youth on elegy rather than following a military career or engaging in legal and political oratory. The poet declares that he is seeking not mortal, but eternal glory, and goes on to predict undying fame for his poetry. At the beginning of Book 2, Ovid is still writing elegy. A second attempt at epic, he reports, was aborted when his girlfriend locked him out; he immediately returned to the only poetic form effective at seducing girls, continuing to write songs “which purple Cupid dictates to me” (2.1.38). As a lover, Ovid cannot help being an elegist, even though other genres continue to attract him. The situation is the same in *Am.* 2.18, where Cupid keeps the poet from writing epic and laughs at his attempts at tragedy, and in *Am.* 3.1, where personified Tragedy and Elegy vie for the poet’s affection, in a parody of the allegorical story of Hercules at the crossroads. Elegy wins for the moment, though the poet assures Tragedy that her time will come. Indeed, at the very end of the collection (*Am.* 3.15), he says goodbye to elegy, telling Venus to look for another poet. Ovid is now ready to write a tragedy, though he still expresses pride in the *Amores* and proclaims that his elegiac poetry has brought fame to his hometown Sulmo and will live on even after his death.

The *Amores* thus tells the story of how Ovid became (primarily) an elegist and (secondarily) a lover, lived a life of love (poetry), and finally left behind both his genre and, we are to understand, the amatory relationship(s) with which it was so closely intertwined. In Ovid’s next works, the *Heroides* and the *Medea*, all the speaking is done by characters, and the poet’s own persona does not make an appearance (of course, the *Medea* is lost, but since tragedy is traditionally a genre where the poet does not himself speak, we can be confident that it did not feature a character “Ovid”). Skipping the fragmentary *Medicamina*, we next encounter the poet in the *Ars amatoria*, where we discover that he is up to some new tricks.

The *Ars* starts off with a grand self-advertisement on the part of the poet: “If anybody in this people does not know the art of love, let him read this book and love as an expert” (1.1–2). The reason why Ovid can promise this much is that he has been appointed – by Venus, no less – the “teacher of love” (*praeceptor amoris*, 17). This phrase is deliberately ambiguous: on the one hand, of course, it means that Ovid is capable of teaching the art of love to his students; on the other hand, though, it implies that Ovid is the teacher of *Amor*, that is, personified love, the boyish god Cupid whom we know already from *Am.* 1.1. While in that earlier work, Ovid was victimized by Cupid and forced both to change his poetry and to fall in love, the poet now contends that he is in a

position to master Cupid, just as a teacher has the upper hand over a recalcitrant little boy. In the past, Ovid yielded to love, but now, “love will yield to me” (21).

The renewed encounter with Cupid highlights the didactic program of the *Ars*: instead of suffering from elegiac love (as Ovid himself did in the *Amores*), the poet’s students will be able to conduct amatory relationships in an enjoyable and rational way and ideally be able to remain in control throughout. As the poet declares, he does not need divine inspiration to speak of this topic: experience has made him a specialist in love, and he will therefore be able to disclose the truth (25–30). This experience, we understand, is nothing else but the sum of his erotic adventures in the *Amores*. Indeed, on occasion the teacher’s instructions seem to hark back directly to Ovid’s earlier work, as when he advises the young men that hanky-panky with their girlfriend’s maid may have its perks but is ultimately too risky to be recommended (1.375–98). Two poems in the *Amores* (2.6 and 7) show the poet in exactly this situation: he has been carrying on with Corinna’s maid Cypassis and been found out, with the result that he now needs all the rhetorical skills at his command to get himself out of this pickle.

At the beginning of the third book of the *Ars*, Ovid has to contend with criticism on the part of his male readers, who maintain that “arming” women against men is the equivalent of making poisonous snakes even more lethal (3.7–8): women are dangerous enough as they are. Ovid defends his project, gaining support from Venus herself, who tells him that after two books for men, it is only fair for the poet to instruct women as well (43–56). With the blessing of the goddess, Ovid embarks on his amatory course for females, which is just as successful as the one for males. Grateful young men and women can both now proclaim that in love, Ovid has been their teacher (*Naso magister erat*, 2.744 and 3.812).

Still, Ovid’s eroto-didactic project is not yet over, and at the beginning of the *Remedia*, he makes ready to assist men and women who are suffering from unhappy love. Who should appear at this point but the poet’s old friend Cupid, alarmed at the book’s title and afraid that Ovid is now openly waging war against him? The poet has to calm the god down: it is in no way his intention to renounce his old arts and his allegiance to Cupid; he has always loved (*ego semper amaui*, 7) and always written love poetry; and his only purpose in the current work is to bring help to lovers so desperate that they would otherwise kill themselves – which wouldn’t be advantageous to Cupid’s reputation either. Convinced, the god gives his permission for Ovid to proceed, and the *Remedia* evolves without a hitch.

We have seen how through his amatory oeuvre, Ovid constructs a story of himself as a poet of love, one who develops from being a traditional chronicler of his own love in the *Amores*, to a teacher of love first for men and then for women in the *Ars amatoria*, and finally to a healer of the wounds of love in the *Remedia*. The decisive moments at which Ovid changes direction from one type of love poetry to another are staged as encounters with the gods of love, Cupid and Venus, with whom Ovid over the course of his works develops a working relationship, presenting himself explicitly as “their” poet. As we move on to the longer poems, the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, the story of Ovid evolves in new and unexpected ways, even though it is clear that our hero, the poet, remains the same person(a). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the two long poems were written at the same time, but for reasons that will become clear, I here treat the *Fasti* first.

Like Ovid’s amatory poems, the *Fasti* is written in elegiacs, but the character of the work could not be more different: instead of singing of love, the poet is now treating religious festivals, political anniversaries, and the rising and settings of stars, and he himself is well aware of the change that he has undergone. Addressing his own elegiacs, he reminisces, “I myself had you as helpful assistants in love, when my early youth played in its appropriate manner and meter” (2.5–6), and continues, astonished at the development: “The same person, I now sing of sacred rites and dates marked in the calendar. Would anybody believe that there is a path from there to here?” (7–8).

One figure who is, at least initially, less than thrilled with Ovid’s new job as a researcher into the calendar is Venus. When the poet invokes the goddess at the beginning of the fourth book (dedicated to the month of April, whose name may or may not be derived from Venus’ Greek designation Aphrodite), her reaction is not a little sarcastic: “What do you want with me? Surely you were singing of greater things” (3). With some flattery, however, Ovid is able to reassure her that despite his different new project, he is still her poet and will remain so. Appeased, she imparts her blessing to the poem, and indeed the *Fasti*, especially Book 4, has its fair share of erotic themes, attesting to the fact that its poet is still an elegist and a devotee of the goddess of love.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Fasti* abounds with the speaker’s reflections on the process of researching and singing about the Roman calendar and thus presents a particularly vivid chapter in the “story of Ovid.” The situation is quite different in the *Metamorphoses*. One of the characteristics of the epic genre is that it features a first-person speaker, the poet who narrates the story, but that except for a

few very circumscribed moments (most notably the work's proem), this persona does not talk about himself or his own poetry, but instead concentrates on telling the tale itself. The same is true for the *Metamorphoses*: while the narrator (as we will see in chapter 4) plays an important role in the poem, he does not get to talk about his own status as a poet except in the proem and the epilogue. These passages continue the "story of Ovid," but in a remarkably compressed way.

The proem of the *Metamorphoses*, only four lines long, is justly famous for its highly artful packaging of significant information. At the moment, we need concentrate only on the first two lines and the beginning of the third:

in noua fert animus mutatas dicere formas
corpora; di, coeptis (nam uos mutastis et illa)
adspirate meis.

My mind urges me to speak of forms changed into new bodies. Inspire my undertakings, gods (for you have changed them as well).

Ovid announces his topic – "forms changed into new bodies," that is, metamorphoses – and calls on the gods for inspiration. The syntax is intentionally convoluted, but the meaning becomes clear in the end. However, what is the point of the parenthesis? What is it that the gods have changed as well – or, in other words, what does "them" (Latin *illa*) mean? Grammatically, the word must refer back to *coeptis* ("undertakings"): it is Ovid's own poetic project that the gods have changed, that has itself undergone metamorphosis. At this point, we may remember that, indeed, a god did once change the poet's work: Cupid, who in *Am.* 1.1 messed with Ovid's verse and changed it from hexameters to elegiac couplets. Now, we understand, the reverse has happened: Ovid, the famous elegist, is again writing hexameters. The gods (which ones we are not told) have changed his poetry once more, and a new, epic, chapter in the story of Ovid has begun. As many scholars have pointed out, it is especially clever that Ovid's parenthesis fills exactly that part of the second hexameter that makes us realize that we are not reading elegy any more.

I have already in the Introduction briefly discussed the epilogue of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Ovid predicts eternal fame for his work. Having built a poetic career from the short *Amores* and *Heroides* via the mid-size *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia* to the monumental *Fasti* and

Metamorphoses, Ovid had indeed created an impressive body of work of which his intratextual persona could rightly declare himself proud and which – as we saw at the beginning of this chapter – had brought the historical Ovid fame and fortune. It is impossible to know how this story of success would have continued had not, late in the year 8 CE, Ovid’s life and Ovid’s poetry met with the disaster that transformed both forever.

The Conundrum of Exile

Ovid’s exile raises two major questions. The first and obvious one is, Why was Ovid exiled? The second presents a more subtle problem, but one that may be equally difficult to solve: How are we supposed to read Ovid’s exile poetry, texts that appear to be highly personal and strongly influenced by the real-life situation of the poet’s displacement to Tomis? In Ovid’s earlier poems, as we have seen, we can easily treat the persona “Ovid” as a dramatic character and interpret the texts, and the situations they construct, from a purely literary point of view. With the exile poetry, this becomes much more difficult, given that we know, after all, that Ovid really was banished to the shores of the Black Sea.

Or was he? An easy way out of the dilemma is to assume that Ovid never went to Tomis and that his exile – just like, for example, his affair with Corinna – is nothing but a literary fiction. This has been seriously suggested by a number of scholars, not so much to help us out of the interpretive quandary just described, but on account of a few other observations. Not only is it the case that, as mentioned in chapter 1, Ovid’s descriptions of Tomis appear to be less than accurate. It is also striking that, apart from Ovid’s own work, the poet’s exile is remarkably poorly attested. It is not mentioned by any contemporaries (Seneca the Elder, for example) or by historians of the period such as Tacitus, Suetonius, or Cassius Dio. The first passing references are found only in authors of the second half of the 1st century CE, Statius and Pliny the Elder, who could have been taken in by Ovid’s fiction in the exile poetry itself.

This radical suggestion founders on two major objections. Why on earth would Ovid have devised such a scenario and dedicated to it a major body of work that is – by his own admission – not a little repetitive? Even more important, it is highly unlikely that Augustus would have put up with the publication of a series of poems in which he was cast in the odious role of the monarch who had banished the poet – if this was not

in fact the case. We can thus safely abandon this theory and find ourselves back where we started. Ovid did go into exile. The question remains, Why?

As with so many things, we have to rely on the poet's own words for the circumstances and reasons of his banishment, and while Ovid returns to the topic numerous times in his exilic work, his statements are, unfortunately, obscure. It is clear that he was ordered by Augustus to leave for Tomis at the end of 8 CE and that his banishment took the milder form of *relegatio* (rather than *exilium*), which meant that his property and Roman citizenship remained intact. Of the two official reasons he gives for his relegation (*carmen et error*, *Tr.* 2.207), the *carmen* ("song") is clearly the *Ars amatoria*. The poet himself confirms this on a number of occasions, most notably in *Tristia* 2, where he undertakes to prove to Augustus that he did not in fact teach adultery in that work. This was apparently a charge that had been brought, no doubt with reference to Augustus' marriage laws of 18 BCE that had made adultery a crime (we will return to this legislation in chapter 7). Most scholars agree that the *Ars* cannot have been the main reason for the poet's banishment and was most likely just a pretext. For one thing, as Ovid himself points out in *Tr.* 2.539–46, the work had appeared years earlier and not met with any attempts at censorship.

We are thus left with the *error* ("mistake") that Ovid alludes to frequently but refuses to disclose, allegedly in order not to distress Augustus further. While the mysterious offense apparently hurt the emperor deeply, Ovid stresses more than once that he did not commit a crime and that his mistake occurred unintentionally. He curses his naïveté and hints that his downfall took place because he associated with people above his station. Most interestingly, Ovid states again and again that he *saw* something, apparently implying that he came upon some scene inadvertently. We may infer that he unwittingly became a witness to an event, or gained knowledge of a plan, that was of grave concern to Augustus.

The mystery of Ovid's exile has exercised readers since late antiquity and spawned a multitude of theories, many of them fantastic. Among the more plausible ones, there are two main lines of approach, which we may dub the sexual and the political. As for the first, the year 8 CE also saw the banishment of Julia the Younger, the granddaughter of Augustus, on the charge of adultery. This could be a mere coincidence, but it is tempting to think that Ovid was somehow involved in the affair (as an innocent witness or as a go-between of sorts?) and punished accordingly. This would explain why the *Ars amatoria* was invoked as a reason for the exile: the poem would have been used to demonstrate that Ovid was a

proponent and enabler of adultery both in word and in deed. The problem with the theory is that the punishment would seem unusually harsh for someone only marginally involved. Note that Julia's supposed lover, Decius Iunius Silanus, got off much more lightly: he left Rome voluntarily, not having been officially exiled, and was allowed back after Augustus' death.

Alternatively, Ovid might have been mixed up in a conspiracy against Augustus, perhaps one intended to strengthen the Julian faction against the Claudians in the battle for the emperor's succession. By 8 CE, Augustus – who did not have a son – had long chosen his stepson Tiberius (part of the Claudian branch of the family) to take over the rule after his death. However, Tiberius was unpopular and there was still support for such blood relatives of Augustus himself (Julians) as his grandson Agrippa Postumus and adopted grandson Germanicus (the son of the emperor's niece). If Ovid was involved in, or had unintentionally become aware of, a plot of this kind, this would explain the severity of the punishment. However, the theory leaves in the dark the role played by the *Ars amatoria* (unless its purpose was solely to obfuscate the real reason); the scenario is also made less likely by Ovid's insistence that he did not commit a crime or, as he specifically states (*Tr.* 3.5.45–6), conspire against the emperor's life.

The two explanations – sexual and political – can be combined if we assume that the alleged adultery was in fact (also) a political alliance or, to put it slightly differently, that the charge of sexual misconduct was used to cover up a more serious crime. The closeness in time of Ovid's and Julia's cases remains highly suggestive, but any attempt to connect the two is of necessity hypothetical. Unless some new evidence comes to light, which is highly unlikely, the mystery surrounding Ovid's "mistake" will not be lifted but will continue to fuel people's imagination for years, indeed centuries, to come.

To turn now to our second conundrum, we encounter methodological issues in reading Ovid's exile poetry that do not appear in the poet's earlier work. We are not exercised by questions such as: Did Cupid ever steal a foot from Ovid's verse (*Am.* 1.1)? Did Corinna's hair really fall out after a botched dyeing job (*Am.* 1.14)? Did the poet in fact interview the god Janus about the meaning of January 1st (*Fasti* 1)? These events, like others recounted in the *Amores*, *Ars*, *Remedia*, and *Fasti*, are part of the "story of Ovid," and we are unbothered by the issue of their (lack of a) relation to reality when we interpret these poems.

With the exile poetry, however, we find ourselves in a fix. Of course, we are not naïvely going to take Ovid's word for it that in the savage

winters of Tomis, the locals have to enjoy their wine in the form of popsicles (*Trist.* 3.10.23–4) or that the poet himself wrote a poem in Getic (*Pont.* 4.13.19–22). But it would be misguided to deny that the anger, despair, depression, homesickness, and alienation expressed in the poems have a connection to the experiences of a man forced abruptly to leave behind his family, friends, and accustomed surroundings and move, under highly distressing circumstances, to an unfamiliar and potentially threatening environment. At the same time, we also have to consider that unlike Ovid's earlier, purely literary, works, the exile poems were at least in part intended to have an extraliterary function, namely, to get Ovid recalled (see the poet's own characterization in *Pont.* 3.9.33–56). They are appeals for help and as such strongly rhetorical, which again makes us skeptical about the authenticity of the facts and feelings they describe. What if the historical Ovid was in fact well adjusted to the perfectly pleasant surroundings of Tomis but painted himself as utterly lost in a barbarian land for the purpose of evoking his addressees' pity?

We might say that while in his earlier work Ovid creates a fictional biography for himself within his verse, in the exile poems he makes his own life into poetry. It is as if once Ovid goes into exile, the poet's real and constructed lives merge: the story of Ovid continues and it is still the story of a poet, but now this poet is much more similar – in fact, nearly (but only nearly) identical – to the actual author. It is possible to read this story in a purely literary way, the way we typically approach Ovid's pre-exilic work, and not to bother about the reality that lies behind it; however, it is probably more honest at least to be aware of the very real situations and emotions that lie behind this highly stylized poetic version of the poet's life.

Even in exile, Ovid keeps up the dialogue with Cupid that began in *Am.* 1.1 and continued throughout his pre-exilic output. As the poet tells Fabius Maximus in *Pont.* 3.3, one night Cupid appeared to him in Tomis, looking sad and neglected with disheveled hair and ruffled feathers. Just as on Ovid's first encounter with the winged boy, when Cupid interfered with his hexameters, now, too, the poet complains about his treatment at the hands of the god. Not only has Love prevented him from writing martial epic and thus from winning fame in a sublime genre. In addition, being the "teacher of Love" has caused Ovid's exile: *Amor* is the only student who ever ruined his instructor. As is his wont, however, Cupid has the last word. After reminding Ovid, somewhat tactlessly, that the *Ars amatoria* was not the only reason for his downfall, he tells the poet that he has come to the Black Sea to comfort him and goes

on to predict that Augustus will relent and finally pardon Ovid. Of course, Cupid's prophecy ultimately proved unfounded. However, even though the "god" Augustus never looked favorably on Ovid, the gods of love and the gods of poetry, who had favored the poet from the beginning of the story of Ovid, remained true to him until the end.

Elegy

Except for the *Metamorphoses*, all of Ovid's extant works are written in elegiacs, and being an elegist is an important part of the identity the poet constructs for himself over the course of his oeuvre. Beginning with *Am.* 1.1, he repeatedly reflects on his use of the elegiac meter and its significance for the kind of poetry he is composing. Clearly considering himself an accomplished master of the genre, he goes so far as to claim that just as Vergil is Rome's foremost epicist, he himself will be considered its most outstanding elegiac poet: "Elegy will declare that it owes as much to me as the noble epic owes to Vergil" (*Rem.* 395–6).

What does it mean for Ovid to be writing in elegiacs, and why is he so insistent on discussing his choice of meter in one poem after another? What were the connotations of the genre of elegy in the Rome of Ovid's time, and how does the poet's work fit into contemporary poetic practice and Latin literary history in general? And finally, what does the topic of love – so prominent in the Ovidian corpus – have to do with elegy, and does being an elegist also always mean being a love poet? These are the questions this chapter attempts to answer.

A Brief History of Elegy

An elegy is a poem written in elegiac couplets, units of two lines, with the first being a dactylic hexameter, the second a dactylic pentameter (in the following schema, the symbol – represents a long syllable, and ∪ a short syllable):

– ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – x
 – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – ∪ – x

As is the case with nearly all Latin meters, the Romans took over the elegiac couplet from Greek poetry, where it was used for a variety of themes and purposes. As it happens, elegy is a kind of “catch-all” genre in Greek literature that is difficult to tie down to a particular topic, mood, or stylistic level – quite unlike, for example, epic, the high-style genre, written solely in hexameters, that was typically associated with narratives of heroic exploits. In the Archaic and Classical periods (7th–4th C. BCE), elegies were performed, accompanied by the flute, at the drinking parties (*symposia*) of the aristocracy. Subjects included rousing calls to battle, bitter-sweet reflections on love, and moralizing about the proper conduct expected of an upper-class male.

At the same time, the elegiac couplet was used for short inscriptions, especially on gravestones or offerings to the gods. Such funerary or votive texts were called epigrams (Greek *epigramma* means “inscription”), and “epigram” subsequently became the term for any short poem in elegiacs, no matter whether it was really inscribed somewhere, imitated the inscriptional format as a kind of literary game (e.g., by producing a eulogy of a deceased person that was never in fact put on a gravestone), or made no such pretense and treated other topics entirely. Epigram is thus, as it were, elegy’s little sister, with the demarcation between the two not always entirely clear (there is no fixed number of couplets that an epigram must reach to be considered an elegy).

Both elegy and epigram flourished in the Hellenistic period (3rd C. BCE onward). Elegies, including very long ones, were written on a wide variety of topics, with Callimachus’ *Aetia* (four books on the origins of obscure religious practices) one of the most famous examples. There was also a craze for epigram, which was now a purely literary genre that could be used to treat pretty much any subject. An important new subcategory was erotic epigram, which afforded poets the opportunity for wittily compressed expressions of desire for women or, more often, boys.

The affinity of elegy and epigram is apparent in the work of Catullus (active in the 50s BCE), the first Roman poet to use both genres extensively. Poems 65–8 of the Catullan corpus are elegies – among them the translation of an episode in Callimachus’ *Aetia* that treats the miraculous transformation of a lock of the Ptolemaic queen Berenice into a constellation (66) – while 69–116 are short epigrams. Though Catullus follows his Greek models in using the elegiac meter for many different subjects, there is among his elegies and epigrams a strong focus on love, in particular, his affair with “Lesbia,” which plays an important role also in the poet’s non-elegiac texts. By far the longest of the elegies (68) is a remi-

niscence of a tryst with his beloved in the house of an obliging friend, and many of the epigrams analyze his relationship with, and feelings for, Lesbia; the best known is the two-liner (85) that begins, *odi et amo* ("I love and I hate").

Catullus' stress on amatory themes in his elegiac output had an important influence on the next generation of Latin poets, which created the subgenre that modern scholars refer to as Roman love elegy. Its pioneer was Gaius Cornelius Gallus, a general and friend of Augustus, who after a falling-out with the emperor ended up committing suicide in 26 BCE. Unfortunately, Gallus' books of elegy (probably called *Amores*, like those of Ovid), in which he treated his love for a woman he called Lycoris, do not survive, aside from one line quoted by a later author and some short fragments discovered on a papyrus in 1978. Beyond that, all our information comes from the testimony of other poets, including prominently Vergil, who was Gallus' friend and had the elegist appear as a character in *Eclogues* 6 and 10.

Within Roman love elegy, Gallus was followed by Tibullus, Propertius, and ultimately Ovid, as the poet himself explains in *Tr.* 4.10.53–4: "He [Tibullus] was your successor, Gallus, and Propertius was his; I myself was the fourth of them in chronological order." While we know that there were more love elegists, including other members of the circle of Messalla (among them Sulpicia, Messalla's niece and one of very few known female poets of antiquity), this list of four became canonical, possibly under the influence of Ovid's pithy formulation. The rhetorical writer Quintilian (1st C. CE) mentions the same group, remarking that "Tibullus seems to me the most polished and elegant author of these. Some people prefer Propertius. Ovid is more frivolous than both, while Gallus is less refined" (*Handbook of Oratory* 10.1.93).

The practitioners of Roman love elegy not only created a new type of poetry that was almost entirely devoted to chronicling the poet's amatory experiences (we will return to the contents of love elegy in the last section of this chapter); they also – for the first time in the history of the genre – formulated a definition of the nature of elegy, that is, the supposedly inherent characteristics of the meter and the texts written in it. As we have seen, in the Greek tradition, elegy lacked a distinct character. It was understood that the genre was less elevated than, for example, epic, but there was no sense that it could be used only for a restricted number of topics. If anything, there was a diffuse belief that, at least originally, elegy was a genre of lament, but apart from the continued use of the meter in funerary inscriptions, the "elegiac" (in the sense of "mournful") aspect of elegy was not in fact apparent in most actual instances.

By contrast, the Roman love elegists constructed a circumscribed identity for the genre. Elegy was now primarily the meter and genre of love and was thus fundamentally opposed to hexametric epic. Elegy was playful and private and occupied a low position in the hierarchy of genres, while epic was lofty and public and at the very top of the generic order. Within the fictional world of the elegists, elegy furthermore fulfilled the important function of winning over the beloved, a task for which epic would have been hopeless; as Propertius puts it, “in love, the verse of Mimnermus [an Archaic Greek elegist] is worth more than Homer” (1.9.11).

Ancient literary criticism was generally predicated on the idea that poetic genres were defined by both their meters and their subject matters, with the corollary that specific meters were, so to speak, naturally appropriate for specific topics. This approach had not hitherto worked particularly well for elegy, but with the Roman elegists’ radical reduction of the genre to the topic of love, poets now became able to creatively employ this kind of critical argument as part of their metapoetic reflections. This strategy is apparent in Ovid as early as *Am.* 1.1, which, as we have seen, starts with the poet setting out on an epic:

arma graui numero uiolentaque bella parabam
edere, materia conueniente modis. (1–2)

I was preparing to sing of arms and violent wars in weighty verse, the subject matter being fitting for the meter.

Ovid’s epic is exactly as it should be: it treats an appropriate epic subject matter (“arms and violent wars”; with *arma*, Ovid is alluding to the opening word of Vergil’s *Aeneid*) in the appropriate meter (the “weighty verse” is clearly the hexameter), with the result that, as the poet stresses explicitly, his topic and his verse are perfectly in sync. Of course, this equilibrium does not last: Cupid converts Ovid’s second hexameter into a pentameter – ironically, at the very point where the poet advertises his adherence to generic propriety (*conueniente modis*, 2). This interference leads to a poetic crisis since Ovid now has a new meter but lacks an appropriate subject matter:

nec mihi materia est numeris leuioribus apta. (19)

I do not have a subject matter that is appropriate for this lighter meter.

The problem is solved only when Cupid provides a topic for Ovid by shooting him with his arrow and thus causing him to fall in love.

In highly humorous form, the poem thematizes the new ideology of elegy: just as hexameters signify war, elegiacs are associated with love, to the extent that it is impossible to write elegy and not be in, and speak about, love. Conversely, it is impossible to be in love and not write elegy. In *Am.* 2.1, for example, it is the necessity of getting the girl to open her locked door that makes Ovid jettison another attempt at epic and return to his tried and true elegiacs.

The same argument from generic appropriateness is developed at length in the passage from the *Remedia* that culminates in Ovid's declaring himself the "Vergil of elegy" (see above). There the poet is replying to critics who have attacked Ovid's poetry (presumably specifically the *Ars amatoria*) as being too licentious. His answer is that in assessing a literary work, one needs to take its meter (and, thus, genre) into account: "If you have sense, assess everything according to its meter" (372). He reviews a number of meters, each of which has its appropriate subject matter – hexameters deal with war, tragic verse with anger, iambs with invective – before stating, "Let seductive elegy sing of quivered Loves" (379). The point is that it is natural for elegy to treat love and to do so seductively, and this is exactly how Ovid has handled the genre: "If my Muse fits my playful subject matter, then I have won, and she [Ovid's Muse, that is, his poetry] has been accused of a false crime" (387–8). The risqué character of Ovid's poetry is exactly what one would expect from elegy and only goes to show that the poet knows what he is doing, and is doing it well.

Claiming elegy as an exclusively amatory genre was an original move that enabled the Roman elegists to construct a distinct type of poetry with its own rules and with great scope for self-referential reflections of the kind that we have just seen in *Am.* 1.1 and in the *Remedia*. At the same time, it was always clear that there was no "natural" law that restricted elegy to love. The elegists felt free to evoke other connotations of the elegiac meter (especially its mournful nature and its Callimachean connection to aetiology) whenever they saw fit, and both Tibullus and especially Propertius wrote elegies that were not primarily amatory. Coming after them, it was Ovid who made the most original use of the genre: while availing himself of the rhetoric of generic appropriateness and playing up the concomitant anxiety (Is my meter *really* appropriate for my subject matter, and vice versa?), he developed elegy far beyond the narrow boundaries drawn up by Gallus, Tibullus, and Propertius and, as we will see below, ended up changing the genre beyond recognition.

Choosing a Genre

In connection with the idea that a genre and its contents are essentially linked, the generation of Roman poets before Ovid developed a rhetorical trope known as the *recusatio* (“refusal”), that is, the explanation of why a poet is choosing one type of poetry and not another. As the Italian Latinist Gian Biagio Conte has observed, a typical trait of Augustan poetry is “the poet’s insistence on letting us know that he could also be doing something else.”³ Thus, instead of simply composing in a particular genre, Augustan poets often take it upon themselves to inform us what other genres they are not practicing and what has informed their choice.

The *recusatio* often takes the form of either a dramatic scene or otherwise a brief narrative of how it happened that the poet came to do what he is doing. An all-important model is the prologue of Callimachus’ *Aetia*, where the Hellenistic poet is responding to critics who have accused him of not writing “one continuous song of the deeds of kings in many thousands of lines” (fr. 1.3–4). Callimachus defends his decision of crafting short but highly polished poems by telling how when he first started to write poetry, the god Apollo appeared to him and gave him a number of cryptic orders, including to “keep his Muse slender” (24) and to drive his chariot on “untrodden paths” (27–8). The divine epiphany is obviously meant to justify Callimachus’ type of poetry, though it is not entirely clear to scholars today what genre(s) exactly the poet rejects and espouses in this passage, or whether he even has genres in mind rather than different styles of writing. However, to the Roman poets of the 1st century BCE, the *Aetia* prologue became a blueprint for their own rejection of “high” genres such as epic, tragedy, and political panegyric and election instead of “low” types of poetry such as bucolic and elegy. In his sixth *Eclogue*, for example, Vergil famously imitates Callimachus’ scene: Apollo appears to the shepherd-poet Tityrus (Vergil’s *alter ego* in the poem) and advises him to rear fat sheep but “sing a finely spun song” (*deductum dicere carmen*, 5). As a result, Tityrus abandons his plans of an epic and composes bucolic poetry.

Scenes of *recusatio* are found all over Latin poetry, including prominently in elegy. Among the “excuses” the poets put forward for not writing in more elevated genres are instructions from divinities, just as in Callimachus (“Apollo told me not to write epic”); the poet’s supposed lack of talent (“I am incapable of writing epic”); or – specifically in the case of elegy – the poet’s being in love (“I have to woo my girl and epic is no good for that”). Having arrived on the literary scene when the *recu-*

satio was already well established, Ovid throughout the *Amores* delights in finding ever new variations of the trope, beginning each new book with yet another explanation of why it is that he is composing in elegiacs. Thus, his fateful quarrel with Cupid in *Am.* 1.1 is a parodic reworking of Callimachus' rather more dignified interaction with Apollo. In *Am.* 2.1, it is the necessity of keeping up his elegiac relationship that prevents the poet from writing that most epic kind of poem, a gigantomachy; in a pointed reversal of one of the typical *recusatio* arguments, Ovid claims that his talent was quite adequate to the task (12; no modesty topos here!) and that it was only the situation with his girl that led him to abandon the project. Finally, in *Am.* 3.1, Ovid trumps Callimachus by having not one but two divine figures appear and give the poet opposing advice: both Tragedy and Elegy do their best to seduce Ovid, who appeases the ladies with the compromise that he will please the one before turning to the other.

Once Ovid moves beyond the *Amores* and thus beyond the horizon of "traditional" love elegy, the question of the right choice of genre becomes even more pressing. In nearly all his remaining works, Ovid reflects on his employment of the elegiac meter and its implications, making creative use of both the argument from generic appropriateness and the *recusatio*. In the *Ars* and *Remedia*, the teacher of love still shows comparatively little anxiety about his use of elegiacs, with the assumption probably being that the fitness of the meter for the amatory topic is obvious (as Ovid makes explicit in his reply to the critics discussed above). In the *Heroides*, of course, the poet himself does not speak and thus largely lacks a means of discussing the work's genre. However, Ovid still manages to sneak in a short reflection on the appropriately elegiac nature of these poems: the writer of the fifteenth letter, Sappho, is herself a lyric poet and thus feels that she has to justify her use of an unaccustomed meter. As she tells her addressee Phaon,

Perhaps you ask why my poem is in elegiacs, even though I have more talent for the lyric meter. I must weep over my love – and elegy is a genre fit for weeping. No lyre is suited to my tears. (5–8)

Sappho is here appealing to the traditional view of elegy as a genre suitable for lament, thus explaining not only her own choice of meter, but by implication that of the other heroines (and, ultimately, Ovid) as well. Of course (though Sappho does not make this point), it is not just their plaintive mode that makes the *Heroides* fit for elegiacs, but also their amatory content.

It is in the *Fasti* that Ovid feels (or pretends to feel) the greatest need to explain his choice of meter and presents himself as most in doubt about the wisdom of his decision. In a way, elegy was an obvious choice for writing about the origins of Roman religious festivals. After all, the *Fasti* models itself on Callimachus' *Actia*, famously composed in elegiacs. Still, using elegy to speak about a non-amatory subject and – what is more – a subject of a certain grandeur and patriotic significance contradicts the ideology of the genre as constructed by the love elegists. Ovid shows himself well aware of this. In the proem to Book 2 (which, as we have seen in chapter 1, may well originally have been the introduction to the entire work), he stresses that the *Fasti* presents a new chapter not only in his own career, but also in the story of (his) elegy:

Now, elegiacs, you proceed with larger sails for the first time; recently, I remember, you were but a slight genre. I myself had you as helpful assistants in love when my early youth played in its appropriate manner and meter. The same person, I now sing of sacred rites and dates marked in the calendar. Would anybody believe that there is a path from there to here? (2.2–8)

However, even though Ovid and his elegiacs have both grown up, as it were, there remains a concern that what is intrinsically a meter of love will not live up to the job of properly celebrating the calendar of Augustan Rome. Not long after this address to his elegiacs, the poet finds himself confronted with the task of celebrating, on February 5, the anniversary of Augustus' having been honored with the title *pater patriae* ("Father of the Fatherland"). In order to do justice to the emperor's honor, Ovid wishes that he had the (epic) genius of Homer and despairs of being able to live up to the occasion with mere elegiacs:

Why, out of my mind, did I wish to impose that much weight on elegiacs? This would have been a topic for the heroic meter. (2.125–6)

Here, as elsewhere, we do not need to take Ovid's words as the expression of actual panic on the part of the historical poet, or even as an indication that it really was difficult to use elegiacs for panegyric purposes. The statement, of course, is part of the story of Ovid and of the continued process of the poet's refining his relationship to his favorite meter and his reactions to, and modifications of, the way elegiacs were perceived in the literary culture of the time.

In the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, Ovid sees no need to justify his genre: given the sadness of his situation, it makes sense for his poetry to

be written in the meter of lament. The secondary characterization of elegy as plaintive (in addition to amatory) comes in handy. Despite the fact that no poetry like these two collections existed before, and that they do not fit easily into any established division of genres, the standard definition of elegy easily accommodates songs of lament (however understood), thus enabling Ovid to continue using his accustomed meter without offering much by way of explanation.

The situation is different in the *Ibis*. There Ovid creates a contrast between his previous poetry, which has been entirely *inermis* (“harmless” or, literally, “unarmed,” 2), and the curse poem itself, whose purpose it is to inflict harm. The description *inermis* is especially appropriate for elegy, which defines itself in opposition to epic, the genre of war. However, there is a certain contradiction here since, after all, the *Ibis* itself is written in elegiacs – which raises the question of how efficient a curse can be when it is delivered in the harmless meter of peace. This tension enables Ovid to play his trump at the end of the poem: his 600-plus lines of dire imprecations have been only a prelude, a preliminary warning to Ibis. If Ibis persists in the evil of his ways, he will receive the “real” curse poem, written in “the meter in which fierce wars must be waged” (642), that is, presumably, the iamb, antiquity’s archetypal verse of invective.

If throughout his elegiac work, Ovid reflects on his choice of meter, justifying it, agonizing over it, playing with it, we may well ask what happens the one time in his extant poetry when he is *not* writing elegy. Would such a shift not warrant an explanation from a poet who built his reputation on being an elegist? And indeed, as we have seen, at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid does provide a reason for having become unfaithful to elegy: *nam uos mutastis et illa*, “for you [the gods] have changed this [my poetic project] as well” (2). These five words allude faintly but unmistakably to the kind of divine epiphany seen in the *Aetia* prologue and *Am.* 1.1, as well as to the power of the gods to direct human poetry; they thus qualify as the shortest *recusatio* in Latin literary history.

Deconstructing Love

Our discussion so far has focused on the connotations of elegy as a genre and on Ovid’s extensive discussions of his own use of elegiacs. But what about the content of elegy? As we have seen, the Roman love elegists maintained that the meter was uniquely suited to the treatment of love. But what kind of love, and how was it depicted by these poets? And how

did Ovid, who introduces himself to posterity in *Tr.* 4.10.1 specifically as a “player of tender loves,” approach the conventions of love elegy and then continue to treat amatory topics in the course of his manifold oeuvre?

As mentioned above, Catullus was an important precursor to Roman love elegy, not only in his use of the elegiac meter, but also in the depiction of his relationship with Lesbia. In Tom Stoppard’s 1997 play *The Invention of Love*, a character goes so far as to claim that Catullus “invented the love poem”:

Like everything else, like clocks and trousers and algebra, the love poem had to be invented. After millenniums of sex and centuries of poetry, the love poem as understood by Shakespeare and Donne, and by Oxford undergraduates – the true-life confessions of the poet in love, immortalizing the mistress, who is actually *the cause of the poem* – *that* was invented in Rome in the first century before Christ.⁴

Catullus’ achievement was the creation of a cycle of poems that all revolve around his relationship with the same woman, a strong character whom he both idealizes as a goddess and abhors as a slut but to whom he feels so powerfully attracted that he cannot free himself from his love for her, even after becoming aware of her worthlessness. This basic setup, and Catullus’ concentration on the painful feelings of the lover, provided a crucial inspiration for what we might call the code of love elegy.

Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid were all highly original poets, and each had his own approach to the genre. As a result, the following description of the elegiac code is of necessity somewhat simplistic, resting on a distillation of common features from all four poets. However, while it is obviously silly to assume that all the elegists were following – or deliberately diverging from – some sort of elegiac rule book, it still makes sense, I believe, to investigate the unspoken assumptions that governed the ways in which these four poets (and their lesser known contemporaries) spoke about love. For one of the striking features of love elegy is how closely circumscribed its depiction of amatory relationships turns out to be.

Love elegy focuses on the poet’s love for and relationship with one particular person, who is most often, but not always, a woman (Tibullus also has some poems about his love for a boy called Marathus). While he hopes for a lifelong bond with his beloved, their relationship is not such as to lead to marriage. Though this point is often left unclear in the poems, the envisaged social status of the protagonists is apparently the

following: while the male lover is a member of the Roman upper class, the woman is a courtesan – not a common prostitute, but a “kept woman,” who relies for her upkeep on the financial support of one or more men, with whom she enters into temporary relationships. This scenario precludes marriage but makes the love affair possible in the first place since the man would not be able to have a similarly irregular relationship with a woman of his own class (who would be either married or a virgin destined for marriage).

For the poet, his love is an overwhelming experience that replaces all other concerns and becomes, so to speak, a way of life. As a result, he rejects traditional values and pursuits expected of a man of his class. In particular, he refuses to participate in such traditional Roman activities as politics and warfare, claiming instead that his pursuit of love constitutes a military service in its own right (the so-called *militia amoris*). In deliberately electing a life of “wantonness” (*nequitia*), the lover thus takes a subversively countercultural stance. It is important to realize that the earlier works of love elegy were written during the period of the Roman Civil War and that their antimilitaristic attitude may well have had a political message, as a generation of young men said no to the senseless internecine strife going on around them and espoused an ideology of “make love, not war.”

In addition to refusing to play his expected public role as a participant in Roman politics and warfare, the elegiac lover jettisons other markers of his social status. Despite being a free male citizen, he depicts himself as subjugated by love in what is often referred to as the *servitium amoris* (“slavery of love”) and, in particular, as the slave of the woman whom he calls his “mistress” (*domina*). The image of slavery already points to the not inconsiderable amount of pain inherent in elegiac love. The lover is at the mercy of his beloved, who is depicted as fickle, unfaithful, and sometimes positively cruel. Instead of dwelling on the pleasures of love, elegy concentrates on its sufferings: the male lover is typically depicted in a situation of unfulfillment, whether he is aggrieved at the actions of his mistress, suspicious of her deeds and motives, or – very often – physically separated from her. The archetypal situation of the elegiac lover is thus that of the *exclusus amator* (“locked-out lover”), who has to spend the night on his beloved’s doorstep, vainly pleading to be let in.

The final central “rule” of love elegy is that, as we saw earlier, the lover is also always an elegist – not just because the poet relates his amatory experiences in the medium of elegy, but in the sense that a man who has fallen in love in this existential way cannot help but write elegies (and, of course, talk at length about his genre). Elegy provides

an appropriate outlet for the poet's pain and, crucially, a potential means for winning the affections of his mistress after all. The elegiac woman is unfailingly a *docta puella* ("learned girl"), as is apparent already from her Greek pseudonym (Catullus' Lesbia, Tibullus' Delia, Propertius' Cynthia, and Ovid's Corinna all have names that are in one way or another associated with poetry), and she is thus capable of appreciating the poet's verse – and his ability to render her immortal. Being a lover and being an elegist are two sides of the same coin: elegy thus treats not just a man's adventures in love, but specifically the love story of a poet.

As scholars have often noted, the very opening of the *Amores* signals that Ovid is going to serve up love elegy with a twist. Instead of falling in love and thus beginning to write elegies, the poet – thanks to Cupid's intervention – becomes an elegist first, at a time when he is not emotionally attached. The god's arrow that makes him love after all is but an afterthought, necessitated by the need for an appropriately elegiac subject matter. Ovid's amusingly rational approach to love and elegy continues in *Am.* 1.2. There the poet, upon realizing that he is indeed now in love, decides right away to give in to the feeling and avoid any painful struggle (the trademark of elegiac love). He cheerfully offers himself as a captive to Cupid and imagines a splendid triumphal procession in which he will march among the god's victims. So far, we notice, Ovid's love is purely abstract: no love object is mentioned, and the traditional elegiac *puella* who overwhelms the poet with her charms is curiously absent. This changes in *Am.* 1.3, where the poet for the first time addresses the as yet nameless woman who he says has captured him. He offers her a deal: if she agrees to let herself be loved by him – that is, play the role of his *domina* – she will not only have a faithful lover but, crucially, also a poet who will celebrate her in his verse. Apparently she agrees, since in *Am.* 1.4 we find Ovid giving her advice on how to behave at a dinner party that they are both going to attend – though she, unfortunately, will be accompanied by her current boyfriend. It is only in *Am.* 1.5 that the *puella* finally receives a name: it is specifically Corinna who enters the poet's bedroom at noon and has sex with him – a fairly unelegiac event, given that most of elegy is concerned with the deferral of pleasure and impossibility of satisfaction.

The opening sequence of the *Amores* thus presents to us a poet who is getting ready to play the game of love elegy, being fully aware that it is but a game. He will adhere to its rules – giving in to love, entering into a typical elegiac relationship with a woman, and showing himself adept at handling stock situations – but makes perfectly clear that what he is doing is following a script. What is entirely absent is the existential,

inescapable emotion that engenders and dominates love elegy in Ovid's predecessors. It is not that the poet does not present himself at least occasionally as tortured by his feelings (in *Am.* 3.11, for example, he does a veritable *odi et amo*), but even in doing so, he makes it clear that he is behaving as an elegiac lover should. Other methods of humorously undermining the high-minded seriousness of elegy include a stress on the physical aspects of love (like the noontime sex in *Am.* 1.5); open avowals of the poet's own faithlessness and affairs with women other than Corinna; and the frank admission that elegiac love needs obstacles to flourish. The last is on evidence in the hilarious poem *Am.* 2.19, where Ovid urges his *puella*'s boyfriend to guard her well in order to spice up the poet's affair. Love that is not difficult holds no appeal, and the poet thus ends with the dire warning that if his rival does not shape up, he himself will lose interest: "If you want me to be your rival, forbid it!" (60).

The *Amores* thus presents an ironic version of love elegy, but one that still adheres to the rules of the genre. In the *Ars amatoria*, however, Ovid goes one step further, proposing in effect that it is possible to have an amatory relationship of the kind elegy describes (a long-term bond between an upper-class male and a courtesan) *without* any of the elegiac pain and suffering. The men and women who master the poet's entirely rational technique will be able to lead an enjoyable love life, and indeed, in the course of the first two books, we observe Ovid's male students as they follow their teacher's advice step by step and end up in bed with their respective girls. What the poet's art of love suggests is that the destructive and irrational side of love can be subdued and rendered ineffectual: thus, in the proem to Book 1, as we have seen, Ovid claims explicitly that "love will yield to me" (21) – an obvious reversal of the poet's own yielding to love in *Am.* 2.1.

Ovid's triumph over love is completed in the *Remedia*, which offers help to all those who – despite the poet's rationalization of *amor* in the *Ars* – still suffer from painful feelings and unhappy relationships. The demonstration that this kind of "disease" can be cured does away with the foundational conceit of love elegy, namely, that the feeling of love is inescapable and overpowering. As some scholars have put it, Ovid thus succeeded, over the course of the *Amores*, *Ars*, and *Remedia*, in "killing off" the genre of love elegy.

However, the poet himself was not yet done with either elegy or love. Already in the *Heroides* (written presumably at the same time as the *Amores*), he experimented with the genre, creating elegy from a female point of view. Finding themselves in the typical elegiac situation of being

separated from their love objects and using the typical elegiac medium of the letter in their attempt to bridge the gap, the heroines go through such typical elegiac emotions as desire, anger, and despair, as well as the basic elegiac feeling of being a victim of both the beloved and love itself. However, contrary to the usual setup, these elegiac lovers are women, and it is the men who have taken over the role of the idolized but fundamentally untrustworthy elegiac *puella*.

In the *Fasti*, Ovid uses the work's elegiac meter as a justification of the introduction of erotic material into what might otherwise have been a rather dry subject matter. According to the argument from generic appropriateness, using elegiacs for Roman religious, historical, and political topics (the official subject matter of the *Fasti*) is potentially problematic, but using the meter to talk about love (not officially the theme of the *Fasti*) is, of course, entirely as it should be. As we have already seen, Ovid delights in playing with the resulting tensions. At the beginning of Book 4, he must reassure Venus that he is still "her poet" and that love remains among his topics even as he is writing about the calendar; at the beginning of Book 3, he has the opposite problem of getting Mars (the patron and namegiver of the month of March) even to interact with the elegist. Ovid asks the god to put down his weapons when entering the elegiac poem, trying to assure him that despite Mars' anticipated skepticism ("perhaps you yourself may ask what the poet wants from Mars," 3.3), the two have things to talk about. Ovid reminds the god that he was without weapons also when he had sex with Ilia, begetting Rome's founders, Romulus and Remus. By telling this story, the poet does the trick of combining the patriotic and the erotic, Mars and elegy – a momentary, somewhat uneasy truce, which must be renegotiated again and again in the course of the poem.

Even in the epic *Metamorphoses*, elegy comes in through the back door. After 451 lines on such fairly elevated topics as the cosmogony, creation of humans, myth of the ages, and flood, Ovid signals a new beginning by announcing the "first love of Apollo" (452), which is also the first love story of the poem as a whole. Apollo has just done the heroic deed of killing the monster Python with his bow and arrows when he encounters Cupid, who is stringing his own bow. Condescendingly, the god tells the boy to leave archery to himself, as this is not child's play. Entirely unimpressed, Cupid demonstrates the superiority of his own arrows by shooting Apollo and thus causing him to fall in love with the nymph Daphne, who – thanks to a second shot from Cupid with a special arrow that prevents love – reacts to Apollo's advances by running away from him. As he pursues the nymph, the god pleads with her, advertising

himself as a lover. However, Daphne is horrified at his proposals and, when her strength gives out and Apollo is about to catch her, she wishes for a change of shape to escape the persistent suitor. In one of the most famous metamorphoses of the poem, she is transformed into a laurel tree (Greek *daphnē*), providing the *aition* for Apollo's predilection for this particular type of leaf.

Apollo's encounter with Cupid, which leads to his being shot and falling in love, is clearly modeled on Ovid's own encounter with the boyish god in *Am.* 1.1. Just as the divine epiphany in the earlier passage causes both love and elegy, its replay here causes love and, if not elegy as such, certainly a strong focus on amatory topics. In his frustrated pursuit of Daphne, Apollo closely resembles an elegiac lover in the archetypal elegiac situation of erotic unfulfillment (to the point of appearing – as many an elegiac lover does – not a little ridiculous). After introducing the amatory theme in this pointed way, Ovid sticks with it for the rest of the *Metamorphoses*, a poem that abounds in erotic tales to such an extent that some have claimed that its primary subject is nothing but love itself.

If the “player of tender love” thus even managed to thoroughly eroticize the genre of epic, what was he to do when confronted with the decidedly unplayful, harsh, and unloving reality of his exile? Turning back to elegy made sense given the mournful connotations of the genre, but did this mean that the amatory aspect of love had to be jettisoned? Ever the innovator, Ovid fundamentally reinterpreted the elegiac code so well known to him in order to make it fit his new situation. Elegy is still about the pain and suffering that arises from separation – though now the poet is separated not from his beloved, but from the city of Rome. Instead of persuading the *puella* and her attendants, elegy is employed to persuade Augustus and anyone who might have influence on the emperor, and instead of dispensing erotic teaching, the poet now offers instructions to his wife and friends about how to go about helping him achieve a recall to Rome. While in earlier elegy, love is a disease that may well lead to death, the poet now suffers from severe homesickness that causes mental and physical deterioration. Finally, rather than idealizing the elegiac *puella*, Ovid in the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* extols his wife, who is the focal point of his emotions and whom he undertakes to make immortal in his poetry. Even in his final works, then, however different they are from his beginnings, Ovid remains fundamentally faithful to both elegy and love.

Myth

What does Ovid talk about when he is not talking about love? One obvious answer to this question is myth (though, of course, we should keep in mind that many myths are at the same time love stories). Ovid's most famous poem, the *Metamorphoses*, remains even today one of the best-known sources of Greek and Roman mythology, a veritable treasure trove of about 250 tales. However, myths also show up frequently in Ovid's other works, just as they are ubiquitous in ancient literature and culture in general. This chapter explores the poet's use of myth throughout his oeuvre, giving pride of place to the *Metamorphoses* and focusing in particular on the intertextuality and narratology of Ovid's masterful storytelling.

The Uses of Myth

Myths (from Greek *mythos*, "story") are traditional tales about gods and mortals. A multitude of such stories (most of Greek provenance, though some natively Roman) have come down to us from antiquity, constituting the complex and confusing system of classical mythology, with its genealogies of gods and heroes and its conflicting versions of the same story from different times and places. The prime medium for myth was poetry, with some genres, such as epic and tragedy, nearly entirely dedicated to the representation of mythological tales. There was a general understanding that myth – so closely associated with poetry – was fictional and that especially its often scandalous stories about the gods had no claim to theological truth (in contrast, at least in the opinion of some

Greeks and Romans, to philosophical speculations about the divine or religious beliefs enshrined in ritual practice). A common way of pinpointing the fictionality of myth was to refer to mythological tales as the “lies of poets,” a formulation of which Ovid himself is fond (*Am.* 3.6.17; *Fast.* 6.253; cf. *Am.* 3.12.41; *Met.* 15.155). Given that myths were mostly told in literary sources, any new author’s retelling had of necessity to take account of earlier versions in earlier texts. Mythological poems or passages are thus typically highly intertextual, reacting to and rewriting previous treatments of the same story.

In many texts, myths are simply told for the sake of the tale itself, with the ultimate purpose of entertaining the audience. Everybody loves a story, as is apparent from the many cases in ancient literature, especially epic, where we find the characters of the narrative themselves depicted as captive listeners to a bard or other storyteller – a scenario repeated numerous times in the *Metamorphoses*. However, often a myth is (also) told for an ulterior purpose or to make a specific point. Here we may distinguish between two main uses, the exemplary and the aetiological.

Throughout ancient literature, poets or literary characters employ mythological stories as *exempla* (plural of Latin *exemplum*, “example”), effecting a comparison between the tale and the present moment. The myth is either used simply to illustrate or enhance the “real” situation or otherwise to persuade a character or the reader of a specific truth or the desirability of a certain course of action. Both types abound in Ovid’s poetry, especially those works, such as the amatory and exile poems, that are not primarily dedicated to storytelling. For example, in *Ars amatoria* 1, the poet “proves” that women are generally libidinous and thus likely to favor his male students’ advances by enumerating a whole slate of lustful mythological heroines (283–342), dwelling in particular on the scandalous story of Pasiphae, infamous for having had sex with a bull (289–326). The intended point is that reality is just like myth: actual women are equally ready to jump into bed. Another *exemplum* that is more explicitly designed to urge a particular behavior occurs in Book 2, when Ovid advises his students never to uncover their girlfriends’ suspected infidelities. He offers a retelling of the famous story of Venus’ adultery with Mars (first found in Book 8 of Homer’s *Odyssey*), making the unorthodox point that after the lovers were caught *in flagrante delicto* by Venus’ husband, they stopped bothering to conceal their affair and continued to meet quite openly (561–92).

In these two cases from the *Ars* (many more could be adduced), the juxtaposition of the rarefied realm of myth and the far less refined world of contemporary Rome has a funny effect. However, mythological

exempla can also be used to ennoble the quotidian and add significance to human experience. Throughout the exile poetry, Ovid compares himself to mythological characters, elevating his own experiences by mythologizing them. One of his favorite comparanda is the much-suffering Odysseus, whose fate as a homeless wanderer is presented as similar to that of Ovid himself. In fact – or so the poet contends (*Tr.* 1.5.57–84) – his own sufferings far surpass those of Odysseus, who ultimately returned to his homeland, while Ovid continues to waste away in Tomis. And that is not all:

In addition, the greater part of his labors is a fiction, while there is no myth
(*fabula*) in my suffering. (79–80)

Myths – Ovid reminds us – are just poetic lies. While they can be used as *exempla* to make sense of real life, the problem with real life is that, however much we choose to mythologize it, it will always remain painfully real.

The second typical purpose of myth in ancient literature is to provide *aitia* (plural of Greek *aition*, “(story of) origin”) for natural or cultural phenomena. As we have seen, the Greeks and Romans were extremely fond of aetiology, which provides another way of linking myth and reality – only this time the two are presented as not just similar (as in the exemplary use of myth), but also causally connected: myth explains why reality is the way it is. Most of the myths told in the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* (the latter of course modeled on Callimachus’ *Aetia*) are fundamentally aetiological. Those in the *Metamorphoses* mostly explain features of the natural world: the metamorphosis of Daphne, for instance, accounts for the existence of the laurel. By contrast, the stories of the *Fasti* are largely concerned with cultural institutions and the origins of constellations. Aetiological tales are also found in Ovid’s other works. Thus, for example, in the *Ars amatoria*, the poet claims that the custom of picking up women at the theater goes back to the Rape of the Sabines, which took place during a primitive dramatic performance. In a more serious, though no less inventive, mood, Ovid in *Tr.* 3.9 explains the origin of the name “Tomis” – etymology, too, is a kind of aetiology – with the grisly story of how Medea cut up the body of her brother Apsyrtus to delay her father, who was pursuing her and Jason on their flight from Colchis (Greek *tomē* means a “cutting”).

Myth thus emerges as a kind of poetic language, an idiom with which Greek and Roman poets were intimately familiar and which they were adept at employing in a number of different pragmatic situations.

Similarly, their learned readers were accustomed to the vocabulary and grammar of myth, being able not only to pick up allusions to particular stories, but also to distinguish between different modes and purposes of mythological narrative. Ovid, of course, is an accomplished speaker of this language, incorporating the discourse of myth into all his poems, whether they deal with love or exile or indeed primarily those “lies of the poets” that ancient authors and readers enjoyed so much.

Epic and Intertextuality

Epic, the “highest” genre in the ancient hierarchy of types of poetry, is traditionally dedicated to the telling of myths, and it is thus not surprising that Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is the most mythological of his works. Still, as anybody who knows other Greek or Roman epic poems is easily able to tell, the *Metamorphoses* is an unusual specimen of the genre. Homer’s *Iliad* and Vergil’s *Aeneid*, for example, each concentrate on one particular myth (the wrath of Achilles and the adventures of Aeneas, respectively) and dedicate their many books to a single narrative with a restricted cast of characters. By contrast, the *Metamorphoses* moves from one story to the next, comprising a vast number of distinct and mostly unrelated tales.

Ovid hints at the unusual character of the *Metamorphoses* in the work’s proem. After announcing the poem’s topic of transformations and invoking the divinities who “have changed these [undertakings] as well,” the poet continues his address to the gods:

and from the first beginning of the world, lead down this continuous song
to my own times. (1.3–4)

There are two main points of interest in these lines. First, Ovid ambitiously defines the temporal scope of his narrative as reaching from the beginning of the world to his own day. The *Metamorphoses* begins with the creation of the cosmos out of chaos and ends with Julius Caesar and Augustus, tracing a general temporal progression from an early period whose protagonists are largely divine, through a heroic age, and eventually to a historical period shaped by mortal beings. We may thus understand the poem as providing a universal history, telling everything that ever happened – or, at least, every metamorphosis – from the beginning of the world to the present. Such a project is by definition very different from a one-story epic such as that of Homer or Vergil, while also defying

ancient critical ideals of narrative unity, for example, those found in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Poetry, including epic, that treats a variety of topics or tells a multitude of stories was, however, not unheard of before Ovid. Critics often refer to such works as "catalogue poems," a kind of mini-genre that existed already in Archaic Greece but became particularly popular in the Hellenistic age, with Callimachus' elegiac *Aetia* the most famous example. Some of these works, such as the *Heteroionumena* ("Changes") of Nicander (2nd C. BCE), which is now lost, treated myths of transformation and thus acted as models for Ovid.

This brings me to the second point of interest in the closing lines of the *Metamorphoses* proem, that is, the apparently contradictory language that Ovid uses to describe the work about to begin. On the one hand, he labels his song "continuous" (*perpetuum*). While this makes sense as the description of a narrative that runs from the beginning of time all the way to the present, it is also an allusion to the prologue of Callimachus' *Aetia*, that famous model for the Roman poets' favorite trope of the *recusatio*. There, the Hellenistic poet refers to the kind of work that he is *not* composing as "one continuous song of the deeds of kings" (fr. 1.3–4), a description that Roman authors took to refer to epic, the genre typically rejected in their own version of the *recusatio*. Differently from Callimachus and his Roman imitators, Ovid is pointedly embracing the "continuous poem," which presumably amounts to a declaration that he is not shying away from epic. At the same time, the poet asks the gods to "lead down" his song, using the verb *deducere*. In the context of the proem, the main metaphor is probably nautical (the gods are asked to bring the ship of Ovid's work safely into harbor), but *deducere* also clearly harks back to Vergil's *recusatio* in the sixth *Eclogue*, where Apollo – employing the same verb but this time in a metaphor from textile production – advises Tityrus to sing a "finely spun" (*deductum*, 5) song. With *deducere*, Ovid thus signals an adherence to Callimachean poetics with its preference for small-scale, highly polished works.

In his proem, then, Ovid presents the *Metamorphoses* paradoxically as both *perpetuum* and *deductum*. The work is a grand epic poem (non-Callimachean), but one with close attention to perfectly executed detail (Callimachean). While it has an ambitious master narrative that is nothing less than the story of the world from chaos to the poet's own time, it is also a catalogue poem consisting of numerous individual episodes. Though its main mode and, of course, its meter are epic, the *Metamorphoses* includes many instances where other genres "intrude" and color the narrative in different ways. We have already seen a strong elegiac presence

in the story of Apollo and Daphne, which extends to many other erotic episodes. Tragedy, too, is a major model: many of the myths Ovid tells were known particularly from their treatment on stage, and the poet includes many monologues – especially of female characters – which are reminiscent in particular of Euripides. Other genres such as bucolic, didactic, and the *Heroides*-style letter also make an appearance.

Retelling a host of stories that had previously been treated in a multitude of different genres, Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* is in a continuous process of creative engagement with his sources. The fundamental intertextuality of the poem is particularly interesting when Ovid interacts with what is probably his most important model, Vergil's *Aeneid*. Immediately after its publication in 19 BCE, the *Aeneid* achieved the status of a classic, the universally admired “national poem” of the Romans. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was the first major Latin epic after the *Aeneid* and obviously had to react to Vergil's work and – ideally – surpass it or, if this proved impossible, at least demonstrate how epic could also be done differently. In choosing the format of the catalogue poem, Ovid already pointedly distances himself from Vergil's one-story epic, and even though both poets aspire to link the Roman historical present to the Greek mythic past, it is obvious that in style, temperament, and general outlook, their two works could hardly be more different.

If the *Metamorphoses* thus generally responds to, and vies with, the *Aeneid*, Ovid also takes the opportunity to treat some of Vergil's own subject matter. The story of Aeneas obviously needed to be part of the universal history told in the *Metamorphoses*, and in 13.623–14.608, Ovid presents his highly idiosyncratic “little *Aeneid*” (as scholars sometimes call it), sticking to Vergil's basic plot but putting his own stamp on it. Episodes of major importance in Vergil are treated perfunctorily in a few lines. This, for example, is Ovid's telegraph-style version of the story of Dido:

There [in Libya] the Phoenician woman (who was not going to tolerate well the departure of her Phrygian husband) received Aeneas in her heart and home, and on the pyre, erected under the pretense of sacrifice, she fell on his sword and, having been deceived, deceived everyone. (14.78–81)

Similarly, the descent to the underworld, so central to the *Aeneid*, is dealt with in less than twenty lines (14.101–19), though Ovid describes at length how Aeneas and the Sibyl walk back to the upper world, a strenuous journey without parallel in Vergil (120–57). Ovid appears to be picking up on the famous statement of the Vergilian Sibyl that it is the

return from the underworld that is the really difficult task: *hoc opus, hic labor est*, “this is the task, this is the hard work” (*Aeneid* 6.129). The Sibyl’s somewhat understated point is that most people do not have the power ever to leave the underworld again, but Ovid takes her statement literally and has his Sibyl and Aeneas hike up a steep path back to the light. Aeneas, well brought-up young man that he is, makes small talk with the elderly Sibyl to distract both of them from the unpleasantness of the journey. She tells him the story of how her suitor Apollo granted her life for as many years as there are grains in a handful of sand, but refused to give her eternal youth since she would not sleep with him. Ovid thus fills in the background left blank in the *Aeneid* – where the Sibyl is not given much of an identity – and, as is his wont, introduces an erotic element into the tale. Throughout the little *Aeneid*, he rewrites Vergil by weighing episodes differently and focusing on themes germane to the *Metamorphoses*, including love and, of course, transformation.

Ovid’s taste for providing a new perspective on old myths enshrined in famous literary texts is in evidence also in his other primarily mythological work, the *Heroides*. There the letter-writers give their own versions of well-known stories, often providing a particularly feminine point of view. Thus, Penelope in *Heroides* 1 describes her constant uncertainty and worry over whether Odysseus is still alive (and faithful to her), bluntly making it clear that waiting at home for twenty years is not a little tedious and that the girl her husband left has now turned into an old woman. In the third letter, Briseis tries to come to terms with the alarming fact that now that Agamemnon has taken her away from Achilles, the latter is apparently not going to fetch her back. She is, as it were, attempting to read the *Iliad* as a love story in which the hero cannot fail to come to the aid of the damsel in distress; her panic mounts as she comes ever closer to realizing that – as indeed is the case in Homer – what Achilles cares for is his honor rather than his love. In describing her traumatic experience as a prisoner of war whose entire family has been killed and her subsequent emotional reliance on Achilles, the Ovidian heroine fills in personal details to which her Homeric source only alludes.

Storytelling

While the letter-writers in the *Heroides* are stuck in the present moment of their epistles’ composition and their myths are told only through flashbacks to earlier events and allusions to future developments (the latter typically unrecognized as such by the women themselves), in his

epic poem, Ovid is at liberty to narrate his many tales any which way he chooses. It is fair to say that the *Metamorphoses* is not just about stories, but about storytelling, exhibiting nearly as much of an interest in the act of narrating as in the narratives themselves. The main narrator (“Ovid”) himself tells some myths at great length while alluding to others only briefly and greatly varies the tone of his narrative from tale to tale, moving from humorous to dramatic to pathetic and so on. In addition, one of the striking aspects of the *Metamorphoses* is the poem’s polyphony of narrative voices: rather than being told by Ovid, about sixty of the stories (amounting to about a third of the text) are narrated by characters. There are altogether about forty of these so-called embedded narrators, with their prominence increasing in the course of the work.

Delegating narratives to characters obviously makes for greater variety, a central concern in a poem that is ultimately just a series (“catalogue”) of stories and could thus easily turn boring. Ovid’s internal narrators have a variety of different motivations for becoming storytellers: they may be telling their own experiences (as the Sibyl does in her conversation with Aeneas), entertaining an audience with a well-spun tale (see below on Nestor), or even themselves performing a poem (for example, Orpheus in Book 10 sings an extended song about “boys loved by gods and girls struck by forbidden desire,” 152–4). Some narratives are multiply embedded. A famous example occurs in Book 5, where a Muse tells Minerva of a song sung by her sister Calliope about the story of the rape of Persephone. In the course of this narrative – which the Muse reproduces verbatim – the nymph Arethusa tells of her own problems with a persistent suitor. Arethusa’s story is thus embedded in Calliope’s song, which is itself embedded in the story of the Muse.

While on one level, narrative embedding with its potential for Chinese-box structures simply enlivens the poem by breaking up the catalogue format, on another, it calls attention to the very act of telling stories and raises questions about the reliability of narrative. Many of the internal narrators have their own agendas, which color their tales and may make both their internal audiences and the readers of the *Metamorphoses* suspicious of some of the details. A striking example of an unreliable narrator is Nestor, who already in the *Iliad* is presented as a talkative old man all too fond of reminiscing about the exploits of his youth. In *Metamorphoses* 12 – part of Ovid’s treatment of the Trojan War – he entertains a group of Greek heroes, among them Achilles, with an extended narrative, full of grotesque and graphic violence, of the fight of the Lapiths and the Centaurs (210–535), in which the half-horse monsters are ultimately defeated by a group of men that notably includes Achilles’ father, Peleus.

No doubt with an eye to flattering his prominent listener, Nestor highlights Peleus' prowess, apparently unaware of the fact that among his audience there is also a certain Tlepolemus, a son of Hercules, who is not amused by the old man's narrative selectivity and who challenges him immediately after the story is finished:

Strange how you forgot about the glory of Hercules, old man! My father surely used to tell me often that the cloudborn ones [the Centaurs] were defeated by *him*. (539–41)

Nestor is then forced to admit that he has edited Hercules out of his version of the story, excusing himself with reference to his own bad experiences with the hero, who – as he informs his audience – long ago killed his eleven brothers.

Rather than simply telling stories, the *Metamorphoses* draws our attention to how stories are told and why. While internal narrators add color and make us notice their idiosyncrasies and motivations, the main narrator, too, keeps us aware of his own virtuosity in moving along the story. His great challenge is to weave together a multitude of individual tales into a master narrative in such a way that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Building elaborate structures of embedded stories is one way of creatively complicating the architecture of the poem; another is to highlight thematic connections among individual episodes and thus create clusters of similar stories (for example, Book 6 contains a number of tales in which human beings are punished by gods for their hubris). Famous – some would say infamous – are Ovid's transitions from one tale to the next, which are often self-consciously artificial. Thus, to take a set of examples from Book 1, after the metamorphosis of Daphne, her father, the river god Peneus, is being visited and comforted by a number of other rivers. The only one absent is Inachus, who is himself greatly worried about the disappearance of his own daughter, Io. Ovid fills us in on the background: Io was raped by Jupiter and subsequently changed into a cow to escape Juno's notice. Suspicious, the goddess has the bovine Io guarded by hundred-eyed Argus, who never falls asleep. At this point, Jupiter's son Mercury, wielder of the sleep-inducing caduceus, comes to the rescue. Disguised as a shepherd, complete with panpipes, he strikes up a conversation with Argus and entertains him with stories, during which more and more of the guard's eyes close in sleepiness. When Argus wants to know the origin of the panpipes, Mercury starts to tell the story of Syrinx and her metamorphosis into reeds – halfway through which Argus falls asleep completely and has his head cut off by Mercury. At this

point, the poet himself, using indirect speech to relate what Mercury *would have said*, completes the god's story before continuing with the tale of Io.

Ovid has thus artfully connected three tales of nymphs pursued by amorous gods, creating one of his thematic clusters: the story of Daphne grows out of Apollo's defeat of Python and subsequent encounter with Cupid; the narrative of Io is occasioned by the mention of her father's absence from the vigil in Peneus' house; and the tale of Syrinx is told by an embedded narrator in reaction to an aetiological inquiry. As scholars have pointed out, one of the reasons why the Syrinx story makes Argus fall asleep is that it is, at this point, pretty boring, being predictably similar to the tales of Daphne and Io (especially the former, where the woman is likewise changed into a plant and thus avoids being raped). Of course, Argus has not heard the other two stories, but we readers have. For a moment, Ovid is breaking the frame, winking, as it were, at his audience.

Time

By definition, narrative involves time since every story, in order to be a story, must feature at least two distinct events (and most stories, of course, contain many more). The passing and structure of time and its relation to narrative is a topic that clearly interested Ovid – the author, after all, of a poem about the calendar – throughout his career. We have already seen how the *Metamorphoses* comprises the totality of time starting from the initial cosmogony. Though the first word of his narrative after the proem is *ante* (“before,” 1.5), the only thing that exists before sea and lands and sky is uniform chaos; differentiation, and thus the potential for stories, sets in only once “god or better nature” (1.21) creates the world as we know it.

Within the master narrative of the poem, with its occasionally convoluted structure and many flashbacks in the form of embedded narratives, it is sometimes difficult to know which events take place before or after which others. Thus, during the universal conflagration caused by Phaethon's disastrous ride on the chariot of the Sun at the beginning of Book 2, the constellation Ursa Major wants to escape the heat by plunging into the “forbidden sea” (2.172) – “forbidden” because as one of the circumpolar constellations, the Great Bear never sets. However, it is only later in the book, and in the poem's chronology, that we learn how the constellation came to be: Jupiter placed his beloved nymph Callisto,

who had been changed into a bear by the jealous Juno, among the stars (and Juno, still spiteful, prevented her from ever setting into the Ocean). By rights, Ursa Major should not yet have existed at the time of Phaethon's ill-advised drive. There is another, similar inconsistency in Callisto's story: she is referred to repeatedly as the daughter of Lycaon, the impious Arcadian king who was transformed into a wolf in Book 1. Since his metamorphosis was followed by the universal flood, which eliminated all of mankind except Deucalion and Pyrrha, it is hard to see where at this point his daughter would be coming from. Chronological confusions of this kind are clearly deliberately engineered by Ovid, who here as elsewhere delights in the artificiality of his own narrative.

Despite such anachronisms, however, and despite occasional detours and delays, the *Metamorphoses* describes a diachronic movement from the beginning of narrative time to the Roman present, Ovid's own time (*mea ... tempora*, 1.4). Scholars have pointed out that the *Fasti*, Ovid's other predominantly narrative poem, constitutes a kind of sequel to the *Metamorphoses*, beginning as it does with the very word *tempora* (*Fast.* 1.1). This connection is signaled also by the fact that the last noncontemporary episode of the *Metamorphoses*, the introduction of the Greek healer god Aesculapius to Rome (15.622–744), is mentioned again on the very first day of the *Fasti* (1.291–2): the poem of the present picks up where the poem of the past left off. If the *Metamorphoses* describes the linear evolving of time, the *Fasti* deals with cyclical time, religious festivals and astronomical events that are repeated year after year. Ovid's two long poems are thus also reflections on two different ways of conceiving of time.

In the *Heroides*, Ovid is interested in another aspect of time. As we have seen, the letters offer new perspectives on well-known myths and literary treatments. They are also constructed in such a way as to insert themselves into the mythological story at one particular moment in time, which the learned reader who is familiar with Ovid's intertext will be able to reconstruct from hints included in the letter itself. Thus, as Duncan F. Kennedy has shown in a famous article, Penelope is writing to Odysseus at a time when her husband is already in the palace, disguised as a beggar.⁵ Since, as she says, she is accustomed to hand letters addressed to her husband to any stranger she meets, just in case he should encounter the hero on his travels, Ovid opens up the uncanonical possibility that she will give this particular epistle to none other than Odysseus himself – and that the very letter will bring about the recognition between husband and wife. That the reader knows what will happen, while the character does not adds to the appeal of the *Heroides*, some of which can be read

like mythological detective stories. Thus, in the case of Ariadne's epistle to Theseus (*Heroides* 10), we are quite certain from our knowledge of the myth and indications in the text itself (esp. line 95) that Bacchus will appear any moment to swoop her up and that she will never post the letter (which, on a deserted island, would prove difficult anyway).

While the single letters usually just comment on mythical events from a particular perspective at a particular point in time, the double letters – written at two points in time and involving two characters – hold far greater potential for real action and thus real narrative. In the correspondences of Paris and Helen (*Heroides* 16 and 17) and Acontius and Cydippe (*Heroides* 20 and 21), we are to understand that it is the exchange of letters itself that drives the story forward. Resembling a good reader of the *Ars amatoria*, Paris seduces Helen with his letter, and while she plays coy in her response, it is quite obvious where things will lead. In the case of Acontius and Cydippe, his letter explains to her that she always falls sick on the day before her wedding to another man because she has inadvertently sworn – by reading out loud words inscribed on a golden apple – to marry Acontius. While Cydippe's letter makes it clear that she is outraged at her lover's unscrupulous approach, she is also quite taken with his ardor; a timely oracle from Apollo clinches the matter, and we understand that the two correspondents will be wed before long. By contrast, in the remaining pair of letters, between Leander and Hero (*Heroides* 18 and 19), the exchange of epistles delays the action. As long as the two lovers are writing to each other, Leander is not attempting to swim across the storm-tossed Hellespont. However, as hinted in the letters themselves, the young man will not remain content with writing instead of swimming for long, and Hero will soon come across her lover's dead body on the beach.

Telling a story not by means of an extended, uninterrupted narrative but through pairs, or more often series, of distinct shorter texts is a technique found throughout Ovid's work. As discussed in chapter 2, the entirety of the poet's output can be read, in a way, as the story of Ovid, with the first-person speaker effecting a sense of progression from work to work. Even within his individual collections of poems, however, Ovid likes to create types of pseudo-narrative. We have already seen how the introductory sequence of the *Amores* (1.1–5) adds up to the story of how Ovid became an elegist. In addition, the entire *Amores* has been read as a kind of amatory “novel,” and while such interpretations can be a bit rigid (not every poem easily fits into an overarching plot), there is certainly a development over the course of the three books, as the lover-poet, after early triumphs, becomes more and more disenchanted with

both his affair and his genre. There are also mini-narratives that extend over the course of two poems, most notably the outrageous story that unfolds in *Am.* 2.6 and 7. There, Ovid first assures Corinna that, of course, he has not slept with her slave Cypassis, stressing that such an association would be beneath him. In the next poem, he addresses Cypassis herself, wondering how her mistress found out about their affair and blackmailing the girl into spending another night with him.

In the *Tristia*, Ovid increasingly loses his sense of narrative direction under the influence of the monotony of exile. While the first book still constructs a story – that of the poet’s tearful goodbye to Rome and harrowing sea voyage to the Black Sea – once in Tomis, Ovid increasingly feels that for him, time has come to a standstill (though he continues to stress temporal markers such as the cycle of the seasons, religious festivals, and birthdays). As he discusses in *Tr.* 4.6, the passing of time usually makes hardships easier to bear, but, uncannily, it has no effect on him:

Time, gliding by with silent foot, is thus able to alleviate everything, with the sole exception of my cares. (17–18)

The only hope he has left is that “on account of my death, these sufferings will not last forever” (50). In the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, incidentally, there is no attempt at telling a coherent story: since the letters are addressed to different addressees, they are, in a way, variations on a theme, but they do not add up to a narrative, let alone an epistolary novel.

The most original use of the passing of time in Ovid’s work is a literary technique that I have dubbed “mimetic simultaneity.” So-called mimetic poems, whose speakers react to events that are purportedly taking place as the text progresses, are found elsewhere in Greek and Latin literature. Famous examples include certain hymns by Callimachus (2, 5, and 6), in which the poet takes on the role of master of ceremonies at a religious festival, commenting on the goings-on and giving instructions to the participants. Ovid was fascinated by the possibilities the mimetic format offered and used it to great effect in many of his works. A prime example is *Am.* 1.6, a *paraklausithyron* (“song outside a closed door”) performed by the poet as he finds himself in the typical elegiac situation of having been locked out by his girl. In the course of his unsuccessful pleas to the doorkeeper, time goes by and the night passes, a fact to which the poet calls attention through his repeated refrain, “the time of night goes by, loosen the bar from the doorpost” (24, 32, 40, 48, and 56). Toward the end of the poem, Ovid observes the approach of day, as the morning star

becomes visible and cocks begin to crow (65–6). At this point, he decides to give up his vigil, bidding a less than fond farewell to both the door and its guard.

In *Am.* 1.6, the action on which the speaker comments is the banal and nearly imperceptible passing of the night. However, mimetic poems can also accommodate quite dramatic events. *Heroides* 9, for instance, is a letter from Deianira to her husband Hercules, in which she implores him to leave his new paramour Iole and come back to his wife. As she is writing, Deianira receives the news that her husband has been killed by the robe she sent him (she believed it to be a love charm, but in fact it was poisoned). She remarks on this horrifying turn of events as she continues her letter, which now turns from an appeal to Hercules to an expression of her own wish for death.

Short mimetic poems like these and many others, especially in the *Amores*, resemble mini-dramas whose plot is revealed solely through the words of the speaker. It was one of Ovid's most original achievements to extend this format to longer works, with the conceit that the text evolves simultaneously to a series of extratextual events on which it keeps commenting. In the first two books of the *Ars amatoria*, we are to imagine that as Ovid utters his instructions, his students are already putting them into action. Thus, at the very beginning of Book 1, the young men are only recruits in love (1.36); however, once we come to Book 2, they have won their girls exactly as – and at the same time as – their teacher was telling them. This leads to the more difficult task of the new book where the men now have to learn how to maintain a pleasurable relationship with their girlfriends: “through my art she was caught, through my art she must be kept” (2.12). This task is fulfilled at the end of the book, where we find the young men and women happily united in bed (703), while Ovid glories in his achievements as a teacher of love. At this very moment (*ecce*, “behold,” 745), the girls pipe up: would Ovid give them some amatory advice as well? Of course he would. On to the next book!

The mimetic simultaneity of *Ars amatoria* is not only highly amusing, but also plays an important role in Ovid's deconstruction of elegiac love: the fact that his pupils immediately and successfully put his teaching into action demonstrates, as it were, that the poet's rational and unsentimental approach to love does in fact work. However, Ovid's most ambitious use of the technique is found in the *Fasti*, a text that is, of course, by definition concerned with the passing of time. In a brilliant move, the poet has devised the work in such a way that the development of the poem and the passing of the year are imagined as taking place simultaneously.

Not only does each book treat one month, but as the book goes by, the month does as well; as Ovid puts it, “together with the book, the year grows, too” (2.1).

With the help of mimetic simultaneity, the poet thus turns what could have been a fairly dry antiquarian work into a lively drama that features Ovid – fearless reporter on the Roman calendar (or, as the god Janus puts it, “busy poet of days,” 1.101) – as he researches and sings about “times and their causes distributed through the year of Latium” (1.1), while the year itself passes by. As he treats each day, he is actually speaking *on* the day in question. Thus, for example, on February 13, he observes that there is a sacrifice to Faunus taking place on the Tiber island, before reminding his readers that the day is the anniversary of the heroic fight of the 306 Fabii against the Etruscans in 477 BCE; on the 14th, he points out the three constellations of the Raven, Snake, and Bowl now visible in the sky and tells their story; and on the 15th, he provides a long discussion of the festival of the Lupercalia that is being celebrated that very day, concluding his discussion with a weather forecast (storms for the next six days) and the aetiology of the sign Pisces, which the sun is about to enter. Ovid’s poem about time is thus a dramatization of time itself and yet another proof that the poet was capable not only of making every statement a poem (as he claims in *Tr.* 4.10.26), but of turning any material into a story.

5

Art

Ovid is anything but a philosophical poet – his fundamental irony prevents him from holding a single position for too long – and there is no point in trying to isolate in his work something like a larger message. Still, if we wanted to look for some kind of underlying concern or major theme found across his poetry, we might fruitfully concentrate on what Ovid has to say about the topic of art, Latin *ars*. As many critics have pointed out, art appears to be a central and positive concept for Ovid – the author, after all, of the *Art of Love* – and one that has a large number of highly significant cultural connotations.

Latin *ars* (more or less like Greek *technē*) refers primarily to any kind of skill and then more specifically to a craft or art in the sense of one of the verbal, visual, or musical arts. In a more restricted use, it can mean the method or principles that underlie such an art, or even a textbook that lays out such principles. This explains the title *Ars amatoria*: the book expounds the principles of love – which is here pointedly treated as a set of skills, that is, an “art” – but it can also itself be referred to as an *ars*. Ovid makes use of this ambivalence in a number of bitter jokes in his exile poetry, where he complains that he is being punished for his *ars*: his poetic art, but also, crucially, his *Ars amatoria* (*Tr.* 1.9.57–8, 5.12.48; *Pont.* 2.7.47, 2.9.76, 2.10.12 and 15–16; note that Roman writing did not distinguish between upper- and lowercase letters, which made this kind of wordplay easy).

In the minds of the Greeks and Romans, art was fundamentally opposed to nature. *Ars* refers to a skill that can be learned or taught as opposed to an innate talent, which in Latin is usually referred to as *ingenium* (literally “innate quality”). It was generally believed that in any human pursuit, including poetry, a person needed both *ingenium* and

ars to achieve excellence. Ovid certainly shared this opinion and in no way believed that *ars* alone could make an outstanding poet. When he says of Callimachus that *ingenio non ualet, arte ualet* (“he does not stand out through his talent, but through his skill,” *Am.* 1.15.14), this is hardly a compliment. As for himself, Ovid makes it amply clear that he has *ingenium* to spare. The story in *Tr.* 4.10 of the prose that miraculously turns into verse in the mouth of the boy proves the point, and in addition to maintaining, once exiled, that it was his *ars* that ruined him, the poet also blames his *ingenium*: *ingenio perii Naso poeta meo* (“I, the poet Naso, perished through my own talent,” *Tr.* 3.3.74). Quintilian even describes Ovid as *nimum amator ingenii sui* (“too much in love with his own talent,” *Handbook of Oratory* 10.1.88).

However, *ars* functions as the opposite of nature not only in terms of the necessary preconditions for human achievement, but in a more general sense as well. Referring to any manner of human ingenuity, the word approaches the general meaning “culture,” denoting the products of human thought and action as opposed to what is given by “nature.” While *ars* in this sense often has positive connotations, it can shade into what is “unnatural” in a pejorative sense: the artificial, the crafty, the deceitful.

Throughout the history of his reception, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries, “cold” artificiality was the very fault of which Ovid was often accused. Rather than expressing heartfelt emotions – as it was believed poets should – Ovid appeared instead to be playing with his subject matter and his language in a disengaged way, aiming at showy effects rather than the evocation of feelings. He was (it was claimed) a highly rhetorical poet with great technical skills, but little to say. Obviously, such judgments reflect the taste of their period, as well as Romantic and post-Romantic ideas of poetry that are not necessarily applicable to an ancient author. Nevertheless, they are interesting in that they are picking up on – though judging it negatively – something that is definitely there in Ovid himself.

In what follows, we will take a closer look at the art and indeed the artificiality of Ovid’s poetry, as well as, crucially, the ideas that his works express about the merits of *ars*. We will start by exploring the poet’s infamous rhetoricity, keeping in mind, however, that while certain modern critics use the word “rhetorical” as a pejorative term, in Ovid’s time, rhetoric was one of the paramount *artes* that every educated man needed to master. We will then move on to what I hesitatingly call Ovid’s “philosophy of art,” before concluding with an examination of the provocatively central role played by artifice and deception in his poetry.

Rhetoric

Rhetorical training was an integral part of the education of every upper-class Roman and a necessary prerequisite for a legal or political career. After learning how to read and write from the elementary-school teacher (*litterator* or *ludi magister*) and receiving instruction in the interpretation of poetry from the so-called *grammaticus*, boys at the age of about fifteen moved on to training in the art of public speaking from the *rhetor*. While Cicero, who died in the year of Ovid's birth, still hankers after a kind of rhetorical golden age when boys supposedly learned by watching real speeches in the forum, by the time Ovid received his training, rhetoric was taught in proper schools, in which, after preliminary exercises, students practiced giving mock speeches on set topics, so-called declamations.

It is this institution of the declamation school that Seneca the Elder describes in his memoirs. The fact that the author mentions Ovid a few times in his reminiscences has clearly contributed to the stereotype of the poet as a particularly rhetorical author. Seneca has inadvertently skewed the perception of modern readers: what he is describing, in the case of Ovid, is nothing but the normal schooling that all young and well-to-do Romans received, but the picture of the poet as a product of the declamation schools has stuck. As a matter of fact, Seneca portrays Ovid as only partially interested in the rhetorical exercises to which he was exposed (*Controversiae* 2.2.12), and the poet himself in *Tr.* 4.10 creates an explicit contrast between the interests of his brother, who "from a young age tended toward rhetoric and was born for the strong weapons of the wordy forum" (17–18), and his own quite different love of poetry (19–20).

If the historical Ovid was thus in no way an aficionado of systematic rhetoric and its displays, it is still true that his poetry exhibits certain features that we may label rhetorical. To some extent, the same holds for all Latin poets, most of whom went through the same educational system. Nevertheless, it will be instructive to focus on a few instances where Ovid's poetic *ars* appears to be particularly close to the art of the *rhetor*.

In attempting to isolate rhetorical elements in Ovid's poetry, scholars have fastened especially on the *Heroides*, a work that, as we have already seen, does not fit well into traditional generic categories. As Ovid says himself, the elegiac mythological letter was his own invention: *ignotum hoc aliis ille nouauit opus* ("he [Ovid] invented this kind of work, previously unknown to everybody," *Ars* 3.346). Among other influences on

this new genre (most prominently, Roman love elegy and the tragic monologue), it would appear that Ovid was inspired by the kinds of declamation in which he had been trained as part of his rhetorical schooling. The so-called *suasoria* (an exercise that the student Ovid, as Seneca tells us, particularly liked; *Controversiae* 2.2.12) is a speech of persuasion addressed to a mythological or historical character, whom the speaker is urging to take a specific course of action. Set topics included: Should Agamemnon sacrifice Iphigenia? Should the Spartans withdraw from Thermopylae? In a way, all the single *Heroides* are *suasoriae* in which the women attempt to persuade their lovers to return to them or act in another way conducive to the relationship. At the same time, they are also *ethopoeiae*, a term that refers to rhetorical exercises in which the student assumes the role of a specific character who finds himself or herself in a specific situation (for example, Achilles over the body of Patroclus, or Medea about to kill her children) and delivers a speech in keeping with the speaker's personality. Thus, despite similarities in their predicaments, each of the letter-writers in the *Heroides* has a carefully developed personality that finds its appropriate expression in her respective epistle.

Even though the *Heroides* is the text in which Ovid's rhetorical training is the most apparent, his rhetorical skills are evident throughout his work. An accomplished speaker was supposed to be able to treat any topic and to represent divergent or even contradictory points of view when the situation demanded it. This capacity to ring variations on a theme or argue both sides of an issue was a major target of the criticism that had been directed against rhetoric and its teaching for centuries: in the eyes of some, training students to take and defend any position rather than instructing them to discern the truth was a morally doubtful and potentially subversive enterprise. This attitude is illustrated in a famous incident of the 2nd century BCE, when the visiting Greek philosopher Carneades gave two different speeches in Rome: in the first, he argued for the importance of justice; in the second, he proved that there is no such thing as justice. Scandalized, the Senate made sure that Carneades left town as soon as possible.

Arguing both sides, or even more than two, is a favorite move of Ovid's. We have already seen how in *Am.* 2.6, he plays a man unjustly accused, making a convincing case that it is inconceivable that he should have been having an affair with Corinna's slave Cypassis. In the very next poem, however, it becomes clear that his outrage has been nothing but a successful rhetorical ploy: of course he is involved with Cypassis and now uses his skills as an orator to make her go to bed with him once

again. Such reversals do not have to occur immediately: after the lover's offended plea to his rival that he finally start guarding the girl (*Am.* 2.19), a few poems intervene before, in *Am.* 3.4, we find him addressing the rival once again, this time constructing an elaborate proof that there is no point in guarding a woman and that it is in fact in a man's own interest (!) to let his girlfriend act (and betray him) as she chooses.

Ovid's didactic works are full of turnarounds of this kind. As we have seen, the poet takes on the female perspective in *Ars* 3 after having first taught the art of love for the benefit of men, and teaches in the *Remedia* how to get rid of love after having spent the three books of the *Ars* advising his audience how to love properly – demonstrating, in both cases, his eagerness to look at things from different, even opposing points of view. Another particularly radical reversal occurs in *Ars* 2. There Ovid spends considerable time telling the lover that he must never let his mistress find out about his infidelities and advising him to keep denying at all costs. After having made this forceful point, however, the poet surprises the reader by suddenly giving the opposite instruction:

You who right now were following my advice and hiding your crimes: turn around and, following my advice, lay open your infidelities. (427–8)

There is nothing better than inciting a woman to jealousy, Ovid the teacher explains: (short-lived) infidelity simply makes the heart grow fonder.

Ovid's delight in different ways of looking at the same thing may also explain his extensive listing of multiple explanations for religious festivals and other features of the Roman calendar in the *Fasti*. Aetiological works, including antiquarian and etymological studies, typically mentioned a multitude of scholarly theories concerning the origins of ancient names or customs that were no longer well understood. Ovid is thus certainly following his sources when, for example, he provides six different explanations for the name of the agricultural festival Agonalia, celebrated on January 9 (*Fast.* 1.319–32). However, it seems that Ovid throughout the work is deliberately stressing such divergences, often refusing to make up his own mind and choose the right answer. Scholars have interpreted this as an expression of the poet's pessimism and confusion in the face of the untidiness of the Roman past and present. In my opinion, though, it can also be read as yet another instance of Ovid's appreciation of the fact that there are always different versions of the same story. When the Muses bicker about the meaning of May (5.1–110) and when Juno, Iuventas, and Concordia dispute the

origin of June (6.1–100), what else is Ovid doing but staging two high-stakes rhetorical contests in which anything can be true as long as it is well argued?

Much more could be said about the rhetorical nature of Ovid's poetry. What has become clear is the poet's willingness and ability to represent different perspectives on the same situation, tell different versions of the same story, and repeatedly change his mind and suddenly espouse a position opposite to the one he held before. As a result, reality appears elusive, all but disappearing behind the shifting linguistic structures through which it is represented. If many different stories can be told about the same fact or event, it becomes increasingly unclear which one is really true, or whether it even makes sense anymore to speak of truth. Each of the six etymologies of the Agonalia, for example, has something going for it, and there is wisdom both in concealing infidelity and in revealing it. A case can be made for pretty much any position, and how convincing it is depends in large part on the speaker's rhetorical skill.

Ovid thus appears to be not only a highly rhetorical poet, but one with a particular interest in rhetoric and its ability to shape our perception of reality. How successful a person can be who knows how to employ language skillfully becomes emblematically clear in two scenes in different Ovidian works that feature Odysseus, that wily master talker of Greek mythology. In *Ars* 2, he appears as an *exemplum* to illustrate that women are captivated not necessarily by a man's good looks, but by his intellectual and rhetorical abilities:

Odysseus was not handsome but he was eloquent, and still he burned sea goddesses with love. (123–4)

During his stay with Calypso, he entertained the goddess at her request again and again with the story of the Trojan War and “often used to tell the same thing in different ways” (128), thus demonstrating the same skill as his narrator Ovid.

In *Met.* 12.619–13.383, Odysseus appears in the traditional episode of the so-called *armorum iudicium* (“judgment concerning the weapons”), where the Greek leaders at Troy have to decide whether to award the armor of the dead Achilles to Ajax or Odysseus. Both heroes give speeches in which they justify their claims, but even though it is quite clear that Ajax is superior in martial prowess, Odysseus' performance is so much better that he persuades his audience to give the weapons to him. As Ovid remarks, “the outcome proved what rhetoric could do, and the eloquent man carried off the strong man's armor” (13.382–3).

Art Conquers All

Ovid's rhetoricity and shifting points of view show how verbal art can influence the perception of reality or even create a reality that was not there before. Throughout the poet's work, there are indications that in Ovid's view, art or culture in general is superior to nature and that *ars*, rather than simply imitating *natura*, can actually surpass it. In a much-quoted passage from the *Metamorphoses* that describes the grotto where the hunter Actaeon inadvertently comes upon the goddess Diana, the poet maintains, paradoxically, that it is nature that attempts to vie with art:

cuius in extremo est antrum nemorale recessu
arte laboratum nulla; simulauerat artem
ingenio natura suo. (3.157–9)

In the deepest recess of the valley, there is a cave in the woods, fashioned by no art; nature had imitated art through her talent (*ingenium*).

Ovid and his readers were familiar with man-made grottos as part of Roman garden architecture, and it is the artificiality of such structures that this feature of the real landscape supposedly imitates. The superior cave, it is implied, is the one fashioned by *ars*: to reach perfection, a natural grotto must resemble a work of art.

In Ovid's world, then, culture improves on nature. This is made particularly clear in two passages (*Med.* 1–50 and *Ars* 3.101–28) in which Ovid celebrates the concept of *cultus* ("cultivation, sophistication"). Both are addressed to the young women, whom the poet encourages to enhance their natural appearance through fashion and makeup. Just as the artful interference of agriculture and viticulture makes the best of the natural capacities of the soil, so *cultus* can do wonders for a woman's face or figure. In the olden days, when Rome was ruled by the archetypally uncultured Sabine king Tatius, the sophistication of Ovid's own time was as yet missing, and both the city (with its straw-thatched Senate house, *Ars* 3.118) and its women looked much more natural and decidedly less attractive. Thank god those times are over: Ovid "congratulates" himself on being born right now (*Ars* 3.121–2), for the very reason that this is an age of *cultus*, far removed from the rusticity of earlier periods.

Of course, the entire *Ars amatoria* is predicated on the idea that art is stronger than nature and that even such an overwhelming emotion as

love can be controlled by rational means. As Ovid maintains in the poem to the work:

Through art and sails and oars swift ships are steered, through art light chariots: love must be ruled by art. (*Ars* 1.3–4)

Helmsmanship and charioteering are proper *artes*, with their own teachable sets of rules; Ovid's claim is that the same is true for love as well. Throughout the *Ars* and the *Remedia*, love is treated as a cultural phenomenon, a way of social behavior that can be learned and taught. Ovid takes particular pleasure in giving advice for actions that would appear to be most spontaneous and "natural." Thus, he tells the women not only how to laugh properly (3.281–90), but also how to cry:

How far doesn't art extend? They [the women] learn how to cry in a fitting manner and to weep at any time and in any way they want. (291–2)

And even though the teacher admits that the very act of sex does not need to be taught (2.479–80) and tells his Muse ostentatiously to stop outside the bedroom door (2.704), he nevertheless does not refrain from giving advice on the art of intercourse to both men (2.717–32) and women (3.769–808), including on that most artificial element, the faked orgasm (3.797–802).

If the *Ars* and *Remedia* celebrate the triumph of art, in the sense of culture, over nature, the *Metamorphoses* exhibits among its many themes a special concern for the figure of the artist. Among the poem's characters, there are numerous actual artists (the Muses and Pierides, the weaver Arachne, the flute player Marsyas, the inventor Daedalus, the singer Orpheus, and the sculptor Pygmalion), as well as a number of figures who engage in artistic activity in a larger sense (for example, the creator of the world and any internal narrator) – not to mention the master narrator and poet, Ovid himself. Scholars have often been struck by the fact that many of the poem's artists come to a bad end, and they have speculated about what this might tell us about Ovid's views of art in general. In considering this question, however, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between different types of artists and their fates.

To take two particularly tragic examples, Daedalus loses his son Icarus in their attempt to escape from Crete by means of the wings the artist has built (8.183–235), and Orpheus is torn apart by raving Maenads after first regaining his wife, Eurydice, from the underworld and then losing her once more (10.1–11.84). In both cases, the tragic events that befall

the two artists have nothing to do with their art as such: Daedalus' wings (labeled an "innovation of nature," 8.189) work amazingly well, and it is only Icarus' carelessness that leads to his fall. Similarly, Orpheus successfully uses his song to persuade the underworld gods to return Eurydice, whom he loses only because, overcome by emotion, he turns back to look at her. His death at the hand of the frenzied women is caused by his subsequent promotion of pederasty, not by his song, which charms even the trees. It has been suggested that both stories demonstrate the failure of art in the sense that for both Daedalus and Orpheus, their supreme artistry cannot ensure their happiness, which falls prey to human weakness and emotion. However, the situations are so different that it is questionable whether they can be reduced to the same easy moral.

The case is different with those stories that feature artists – the Pierides, Arachne, and Marsyas – who dare to compete with gods in their respective arts and end up being punished for their hubris. These tales occur in close proximity to one another and in the context of other narratives about presumptuous or blasphemous mortals; Minerva's vendetta against Arachne is even specifically said to be motivated by her having heard the tale of the Muses and the Pierides (6.1–4). It is Arachne's story that offers the most promising material for a self-referential interpretation since the young weaver's art is presented in such a way as to invite comparison with Ovid's own poetry.

Having heard that Arachne excels at weaving to the extent of challenging even Minerva to a contest, the goddess of crafts appears to the girl in the shape of an old woman, trying to persuade her to desist from her hubris. When Arachne refuses, Minerva takes on her real shape, and the contest begins. Ovid describes both tapestries in detail. Minerva in one central panel depicts her own triumph over Neptune in their competition over Athens, filling the corners with cautionary images of mortals punished by gods. Arachne, by contrast, creates a disorderly swirl of gods in animal shape who are in the process of seducing or raping women. It is easy to see how the two textiles are meant to represent two different styles of poetry and how Arachne's work bears a close resemblance, in both content and style, to the *Metamorphoses* itself. The quality of the girl's work is such that neither Envy nor Minerva herself can find fault with it (6.129–30); it is out of mere spite that the goddess strikes Arachne with her shuttle and tears apart her competitor's tapestry. When the latter attempts to hang herself out of shame, however, the goddess takes pity and changes her into a spider.

In the cases of the Pierides' competition with the Muses (5.294–678) and Marsyas' challenge of Apollo (6.382–400), it is impossible to tell

how good or bad the human contestants are at their respective arts. The song of the Pierides gets bad press, but the narrator there is one of the Muses herself and thus obviously biased; as for Marsyas, Ovid does not dwell on the contest itself but gives a vivid and shocking description of how Apollo flays the unfortunate satyr. Arachne, the Pierides, and Marsyas all meet their downfall because they make the mistake of challenging the authority of the gods, and it is attractive to read their stories as cautionary tales about the dangers of censorship and oppression to which artists – even such a brilliant and obviously “Ovidian” artist as Arachne – are exposed. Scholars have even interpreted these narratives as premonitions of, or – if the *Metamorphoses* was reworked in exile – allegories for, Ovid’s own punishment at the hand of Augustus. Be that as it may, Arachne, too, is certainly someone who perished through her own *ars* and *ingenium*.

However, not all artists in the *Metamorphoses* meet with disaster. Pygmalion, whose story is told by Orpheus as part of his extended song in Book 10, is a sculptor, who out of disgust at the female sex – he is offended by the example of the Propoetides, sisters who denied the divinity of Venus and, as punishment, were first forced to prostitute themselves and then turned into stone (10.238–42) – decides to live celibate. He fashions for himself “by wondrous art” (247) the ivory statue of a perfect woman (“such as no [real] woman can be born,” 248–9) and subsequently falls in love with his own work. The statue is so lifelike that she nearly deceives Pygmalion himself: *ars adeo latet arte sua* (“to such an extent is art hidden by its own art,” 252). He starts treating her like a real woman, dressing her, bringing her gifts, putting her in his own bed, and calling her his wife. When a festival of Venus takes place at the local temple, Pygmalion attends and prays to the goddess to give him as a wife a “woman similar to my ivory one” (276) – with Ovid adding the nice psychological touch that the sculptor really wants to ask to be able to marry the statue itself, but is afraid to give voice to this desire. When Pygmalion returns home and begins to touch the statue, it grows warm and soft under his caressing hands. The metamorphosis is complete when the woman opens her eyes: what had been a work of art has turned into a human being.

There are different ways of reading this story, including the obvious feminist interpretation by which Pygmalion is the male artist who creates an artificial woman to suit his own purposes – just as, for example, the elegist constructs the figure of the *puella*. However, given the stress on Pygmalion’s art throughout the episode, it is attractive to view the sculptor as the consummate artist, whose success illustrates the Ovidian belief that art can indeed triumph over nature. Aided by the goddess of love

(just as Ovid so often claims himself to be in his poetic endeavors), Pygmalion by means of art creates his own reality that is more perfect than nature itself.

We may feel inclined to dismiss the Pygmalion story as an erotic and artistic fantasy: it is, after all, told by Orpheus, whose attempt to (re)create his own marriage by means of his art failed on account of his final loss of nerve. However, within the *Metamorphoses* itself, there is yet another artist who succeeds again and again at shaping reality through his artistry and creating a whole world according to his own design. That artist is, of course, none other than Ovid himself, who first creates the cosmos with his words and then, throughout the fifteen books, keeps working to refine its features. Scholars have often pointed out how Ovid's detailed descriptions of the poem's many metamorphoses are reminiscent of *ecphrasis*, the poetic description of a work of art (for example, Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*). Since the vast majority of metamorphoses are irreversible, they result in fixed features of the natural world, monuments, as it were, of the human beings and the experiences that led to their transformations. When in the poem's epilogue, Ovid claims that he has "fashioned a work" (*opus exegi*, 15.871) that cannot be destroyed, his language harks back to the vocabulary of sculpture. Just as Pygmalion created a single living woman, Ovid, the master artist, has brought to life the entire world as we know it.

Artifice and Artificiality

According to the Ovidian "philosophy of art," *ars* conquers all. In the universe of the *Metamorphoses*, it is the poet's art that fashions a whole cosmos subject to continuous artistic transformation and revision. In the *Ars amatoria*, common Roman men and women, working on a much smaller scale and in much more mundane surroundings, nevertheless also create an artificial world of their own, an amatory universe of contrivance in which they conduct their affairs. What is it like to live in such a world of artifice, in which every behavior has been carefully planned and every situation deliberately staged? Ovid's paradoxical answer is that it is in fact emotionally highly satisfying.

Throughout the *Amores*, *Ars*, and *Remedia*, the poet implies, or even claims explicitly, that knowingly moving in an environment of contrivance and indeed deception is not necessarily painful or demoralizing but, if done properly, very pleasant. The person who consciously manipulates, and lets himself or herself be manipulated by, others has the chance to

tweak reality to his or her own liking. Art conquers nature; you can have a better life through artifice.

Ovid's favorable attitude to artifice and artificiality may appear shocking to certain readers, and some scholars have in fact maintained that far from advocating the "unnatural" use of contrivance and deception, especially in matters of the heart, Ovid is in fact denouncing it. According to their reading, it is simply the persona of the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria* who believes that amatory relationships can be successfully conducted through art(fulness), while the author himself means to expose the unfeeling inhumanity of such an attitude, as well as its ultimate failure. We are not supposed to buy into the "art of love"; we are supposed to abhor it.

While I do not view Ovid as an earnest missionary for a particular way of life, I do think that he is serious, if also humorously provocative, in his celebration of artificiality. As for the split between the author and the persona, this of course exists, but I do not see how the supposed intentions of the author can possibly be recovered, given that all we have are the utterances of the persona. For our purposes, "Ovid" is his persona. I also suspect that many such interpretations are ultimately founded on the critics' acute discomfort with Ovid's stance and their wish to "rescue" the poet from his convictions. After all, our society puts a premium on sincerity, and so Ovid's nonchalant acceptance and even promotion of artifice constitute a scandal.

But let us take a closer look at how Ovid thinks that the game of love (and life) should be played. It is the prescriptive *Ars amatoria* that gives the most detailed advice concerning human behavior, but already in the more descriptive *Amores*, as we have seen, there is a strong sense of the constructedness of the elegiac situation: both the lover and the *puella* are expected to behave in certain established ways, and through the utterances of the poet, his expressions of likes and dislikes, we can reconstruct how he thinks the elegiac personnel should ideally go about their business.

As Ovid views it, there is a basic dilemma at the heart of the elegiac setup. On the one hand, there has to be an obstacle between the man and the woman, typically in the form of another man, the rival. Without such an obstacle, the archetypal situation of elegy – the separation of lover and *puella* – no longer obtains, which, at least in the eyes of Ovid, means that the relationship has lost all psychological interest. This explains why the poet in *Am.* 2.19 berates the rival for not doing his job, for failing to keep the girl away from him and thus threatening to disturb the carefully arranged elegiac love triangle.

On the other hand, the Ovidian lover (unlike his Tibullan and Propertian forebears) is not a masochist and has no interest in suffering overly much from the *puella*'s unfaithfulness. He is perfectly willing to put up with it, as long as he does not have to know about it. The resultant "desirability of mendacity," to use the formulation of Latinist John T. Davis, is on evidence in many *Amores* poems, in which Ovid explicitly tells Corinna to lie to him.⁶ The theme is developed at greatest length in *Am.* 3.14, where the lover enjoins the *puella* to keep denying even the most manifest signs of her infidelity. His attitude to the matter is clear from the opening couplet:

I don't object to your peccadilloes, given how beautiful you are, but I object to having to know about them and be miserable. (*Am.* 3.14.1–2)

The Ovidian lover is thus consciously working to devise a situation that allows him to have it both ways: while the rival is needed to make the relationship sufficiently interesting (not to mention properly elegiac), the details of his affair with the *puella* are deliberately suppressed in order to keep the lover happy. It is entirely obvious to the participants that they are engaged in a game of make-believe, but if everybody sticks to his or her roles the elegiac drama can unfold in a way that is maximally satisfying to all.

In the *Ars amatoria*, of course, Ovid can be much more explicit about how to fashion the artwork of a long-lasting *amor*. Both men and women receive detailed advice on how to behave in order to attract and detain the opposite sex. There is little place for spontaneous behavior and absolutely no need for sincerity. Thus, the men are told to make their girlfriends believe that they are overwhelmed by their beauty (*Ars* 2.295–6) and in any situation to praise their dress, hair style, skill at dancing and singing, and love-making abilities (297–308). Similarly, the teacher instructs the women (especially ones who are already unfaithful) to give their boyfriends the impression that they are wildly in love with them. This is easy enough to achieve with languorous looks, sighs, and tears; after all, most men are convinced anyway that even goddesses would fall for them (3.673–82).

The elegiac dilemma of how to handle unfaithfulness with maximal gain and minimal pain is likewise at the center of the *Ars*. Unsentimentally, Ovid presupposes that both men and women will occasionally become involved with partners outside their main relationships and offers practical advice for conducting such affairs and for dealing with the infidelity of one's partner. For the most part, the teacher advocates a kind of

don't-ask-don't-tell policy: the guilty party is to deny, the hurt party to ignore. However, occasionally it makes sense to reveal one's betrayal since there is little that kindles a complacent love like jealousy. Of course, no real threat to the relationship needs to exist since it can simply be invented. Thus, the teacher gives detailed instructions to the *puellae* about how to make their lovers falsely believe that they have a rival: even though the man could easily enter his girlfriend's house through the door, he is to be let in through the window and received by a clearly fearful *puella*. On cue, a maid is to rush in screaming, "We are lost!," whereupon the young man will need to be hidden away (3.605–8). This extreme case, with its affinity to farce, shows how far the teacher of love goes in directing his students. Their whole love life is a performance and thus a work of art.

Most of Ovid's amatory artifice involves deception, and indeed he cheerfully urges his students to "deceive the deceivers" (*fallite fallentes*, *Ars* 1.645). Both parties, men and women, deceive each other and are conscious both of their own craftiness and of that of their lovers. What Ovid appears to be saying is that you can live in this world of deception, which is at least partly your own creation, and live well in it. In addition, there is, in the poet's eyes, an interesting psychological dimension to the kind of pretense he advocates. Often enough, what is pretended becomes reality, and someone who just plays the lover may well fall in love for real:

The pretender often began to love for real; often what he initially had made up actually came to be. (1.615–16)

This potential for role-playing to turn into reality is used for therapeutic purposes in the *Remedia*, where Ovid advises the unhappy lover to pretend that he is *not* in love:

Pretend to be what you are not and imitate someone who has stopped loving: thus you will do for real what you were only rehearsing. ... Love enters our minds through practice and is unlearned through practice: he who is able to play a healthy man will be healthy. (*Rem.* 497–8 and 503–4)

Artifice not only creates an alternative reality but can change reality itself.

Finally, while most of Ovid's recommendations of make-believe occur in the context of erotic relationships, there are other situations in which pretense comes in handy as well. In a famous passage in *Ars* 1, the teacher discusses lovers' oaths, maintaining that these alone need not be kept; in

all other cases, fear of divine retribution ought to prevent people from swearing falsely. The belief in gods who punish wrongdoing thus plays a crucial role in upholding law and order in human society. As Ovid puts it, “it is expedient for the gods to exist and, since it is expedient, let us believe they do” (*Ars* 1.637). While this sentiment is not without parallel in serious theological discussions from antiquity, it is, in a way, just an extension of Ovid’s general advice to believe the world to be the way one likes it: just as it is advantageous to pretend that one’s girlfriend is faithful, so it is useful to assume that there are gods.

The “desirability of mendacity” can even be detected in the exile poems, where the situation is, of course, much grimmer. In *Tr.* 3.5, Ovid addresses a faithful friend, telling him that his life at Tomis is sustained only by his hope that Augustus will recall him after all:

I am carried along by the tiny hope – which you should not take away from me – that the hostile spirit of the god might grow milder. Whether I am waiting for this in vain or whether it is fated to happen, please prove to me what I want, namely, that it *is* fated. Confer the entire eloquence of your tongue to that one task, to demonstrate that my wish can come true. (25–30)

The passage is ambivalent. On the one hand, Ovid is asking his friend to prove that his wish for a recall will come true by keeping up his efforts on the poet’s behalf and employing his eloquence to plead with Augustus. On the other hand, it very much sounds as though Ovid is imploring his addressee to use his power of speech to persuade Ovid himself that there is still hope – whether the friend really believes it or not. Just as in the amatory works, Ovid wishes to be deceived into believing that which he prefers to be true.

The same wish is on evidence in *Tr.* 4.7, a short poem to a former friend, who during the two years of Ovid’s exile thus far has not sent a single letter. The poet starts with reproachful questions, but soon alights on the idea that perhaps every one of his friend’s letters has been lost in transit. Yes, this must be it, since obviously it is impossible to believe that the addressee would have abandoned Ovid. The letter ends with a renewed exhortation to write, “so that I don’t always have to excuse yourself to me, my friend” (26). By pretending that the letters have been lost, Ovid softens his accusations and allows the addressee to save face: as long as he starts writing now, no rift will have occurred. At the same time, the poet’s all too eager acceptance of this unlikely scenario is reminiscent of the conscious propensity to self-deception exhibited by the

persona of the *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*. As Ovid says while convincing himself that Corinna's aborted child was his (and not another man's): *est mihi pro facto saepe quod esse potest* ("I often consider as a fact that which is possible," *Am.* 2.13.6).

In Ovid's universe, art goes a long way. Visual and verbal artists create their own worlds that improve on nature, while ordinary men and women through conscious deception and self-deception are able to shape reality in ways that make it more livable. Perhaps there are no gods; perhaps there is no letter in the mail; perhaps our lover is neither overwhelmingly beautiful nor particularly faithful; perhaps, to tell the truth, we are not all that much in love ourselves. However – and this is Ovid's provocative challenge – why don't we just pretend that all these things are true? Wouldn't the world be a better place? And who knows? Perhaps like Pygmalion, we will find in the end that our creations have in fact come to life.

Women

Readers have always been struck by the prominent role women play in Ovid's poetry. There are many memorable female characters in the *Metamorphoses*, all the single *Heroides* chronicle the experiences of mythological women, and the poet dedicates an entire book of his *Ars amatoria* to the *puellae*. Even his one attempt at tragedy featured one of the most powerful female figures of ancient literature, the sorceress Medea.

Not only do women figure prominently in the Ovidian corpus, but the poet appears to have a particular interest in exploring female perspectives. Mythological women get to tell their side of the story in the *Heroides* and in some of the narratives and monologues of the *Metamorphoses*, while *Ars* 3 discusses specifically female approaches to the contemporary art of love. Ovid's special focus on women is thus beyond doubt, but critics have differed greatly on how to interpret it. On the one hand, it has been claimed that Ovid is particularly sympathetic to women, showing remarkable understanding for their situations and psychology and expressing positions, especially on the equality of the sexes, that might even be described as proto-feminist. On the other hand, many readers have found Ovid's depiction of women sexist or even misogynistic.

Reactions to Ovid's treatment of women, just as to other aspects of his poetry, will always be subjective and colored by a given reader's own taste and opinions. This chapter will not attempt to reach a final verdict on Ovid's attitude to the female sex but explore the treatment of women in his poetry, focusing in particular on the remarkable preponderance of heterosexual relationships in his amatory poetry and on the ways in which he presents gendered behavior as a cultural construct. As will become

clear in the course of the discussion, while many of Ovid's views on gender relations will seem alien or even objectionable to today's readers, some of them turn out to be remarkably similar to modern ideas.

The Female Perspective

Many of the works and passages that have been adduced to demonstrate Ovid's sympathy for women and his "feminist" stance have also been seen as proving the opposite, that is, a disrespectful and exploitative attitude to females. A famous example is Ovid's championship of mutual orgasm. In the *Ars amatoria*, the poet makes it clear that women ought to enjoy sex as much as men (2.681–92, 703–32, and 3.789–804): as he euphemistically puts it, "that matter should equally please both" (3.794). He spends a fair amount of time talking about female pleasure and about how men should go about genitally stimulating their partners. Ideally, both the man and the woman ought to reach climax at the same time:

Rush toward the finishing line together. Pleasure is perfect when man and woman lie there, equally overcome. (2.727–8)

This would appear to be a fairly progressive attitude, especially when we compare it to an infamous passage in the Roman poet Lucretius, who wrote just a few decades before Ovid and who, in his own discussion of intercourse, advises women not to move so as not to endanger conception (*On the Nature of Things* 4.1268–77). While such "undulations" on the part of the female partner can make sex more enjoyable for the man (1276; there is no mention whatsoever of the woman's pleasure), this sort of behavior, Lucretius concludes, "in no way appears to be necessary for our wives" (1277).

However, on closer inspection, Ovid's insistence on the importance of female sexual enjoyment appears less altruistic. It is clear that he considers the woman's pleasure at least in part a turn-on for the man (esp. 2.689–92), and he thus advises his female students to fake orgasm when necessary (3.779–802). Even the ideal of simultaneous climax only goes so far. If there is not enough time, or if there is a fear that the lovers might be caught in the act, then the man should simply "press on with all oars and give the spur to the urged-on horse" (2.731–2). Ultimately, Ovid is watching out for the pleasure of the man.

Other parts of Ovid's work offer similar ambiguities. Is *Ars* 3 meant to assist the women's cause in the battle of the sexes? Or are its instruc-

tions designed to create exactly the kind of cultivated female lover that men desire – or, alternatively, is the book a joke for the benefit of male readers, who get a kick out of peering into the boudoir, as it were? Do the single *Heroides* offer uniquely female perspectives on traditional myths, subversively resisting and rewriting the male text? Or are the letters (really written by a man, Ovid) a gallery of caricatures that stereotype women as whiny, vindictive, and ineffectual?

Finally (to mention a particularly problematic issue), what about the many rapes described in the *Metamorphoses*? The coupling of gods with mortal women or nymphs was an intrinsic feature of Greek mythology, needed to establish the many genealogies of human heroes and kings that make up the mythical personnel. How exactly the couples in question came to have sex was not always made clear in the literary sources on which Ovid relied; male violence was an obvious explanation, but the question could be elided through euphemisms or anodyne statements to the effect that “nymph *x* bore son *y* to god *z*.” Ovid, by contrast, makes it bluntly clear that such instances of intercourse are nearly always rapes. How central the topic is to the *Metamorphoses* is apparent from the fact that the tapestry of Arachne, which, as we have seen, functions as a kind of miniature version of the poem as a whole, consists entirely of scenes in which gods force themselves on various women.

How to interpret Ovid’s stress on rape? Is he exposing the brutality of the rapist gods (as Arachne surely is, whose tapestry is described as *caelestia crimina*, “crimes of/accusations against the gods,” 6.131) and sympathizing with the plight of the victims? Or are his rape scenes simply instances of violent pornography? Consider the most brutal rape narrative in the poem – interestingly, the only one with a human rapist – in which Tereus forces himself on his sister-in-law Philomela and then silences her protest by cutting out her tongue (6.519–62). Both the rape and the mutilation are described in detail, with special attention given to the writhing tongue as it lies on the ground at the feet of its former mistress. To add horror to horror, Ovid concludes the scene by remarking:

Even after this deed, he is said (I can hardly believe it) to have raped her mutilated body again and again in his lust. (6.561–2)

Is this a denunciation of violence against women or, conversely, voyeuristic enjoyment of such violence? The interpretation of the episode is further complicated by its denouement, in which Philomela and her sister take cruel revenge on Tereus by killing his infant son, cooking him,

and serving him as a meal to his father. The story ends with all the protagonists changed into birds.

The reaction of modern readers to this extreme episode and to the depiction of women in Ovid's work in general is of necessity colored by current views on sexuality, gender relations, and women's rights. By contrast, Ovid lived and wrote in a patriarchal society, whose norms and values were in many ways strikingly different from those widely held in Western countries today. We obviously have to factor in this cultural difference if we wish to do justice to a poet who simply cannot be expected to share all the sensibilities and concerns of his readers today. Of course, it is not all that easy to reconstruct the precise attitude to women exhibited by Ovid's contemporaries, and there was, no doubt, a certain spectrum of opinions, but it is surely fair to say that when the poet wrote, it was generally accepted that women were in certain respects inferior to men and were expected to play a subordinate role in society. On the other hand, this does not mean that indiscriminate violence against women was in any way sanctioned (it was not) or that – outside the unreal world of myth – the rape of at least a free Roman woman was not considered a serious offense (it was).

It would be interesting to know how readers, especially female readers, of Ovid's time reacted to the poet's depiction of women. Unfortunately, as usual, we do not have much evidence: all the information comes from Ovid's own work and cannot therefore be taken as plain fact. Nevertheless, some of the poet's remarks are suggestive. As far as the "official" response to his poetry is concerned, the *Ars amatoria* was, of course, used as a justification for Ovid's exile on the grounds that the poet had taught adultery in this work. This could be taken as evidence that readers such as Augustus thought (or could easily pretend that they thought) that Ovid in this work had shown disrespect at least toward married women. Still, any concern was probably less for women and their dignity as such than for public morality and the letter of Augustus' marriage law, which made adultery a crime (we will return to this topic in the next chapter). Even before Ovid's banishment, however, some contemporary readers must have viewed the *Ars amatoria* as scandalous: this is apparent from the poet's defense in *Rem.* 361–96, where, as we have seen, Ovid makes the case that the licentious nature of his poem is wholly in keeping with its elegiac genre.

If sterner critics were scandalized by Ovid's subject matter, regular readers – if we can trust the poet's own words – enjoyed it. That this audience included women is made clear by the intervention of the *puellae* at the end of *Ars* 2: it is because they have been reading along with the

men that they now ask for their own book (cf. also *Ars* 1.617). In *Am.* 2.1.5–10, Ovid explicitly states that his ideal readership includes not just men, but women as well: “the girl who does not remain cold at the sight of her betrothed should read me” (5). He goes on to state that male readers, at any rate, will be able to identify with the elegiac lover and recognize in Ovid’s verse their own experiences. That women, too, might read themselves into the world of elegy and wish to become a part of it is implied by the poet’s boast in *Am.* 2.17.28 that many women would like to be the subject matter of his verse. In fact, he continues,

I know one girl who is spreading around that she is Corinna. What would she not give in order to become her? (29–30)

While this statement constitutes a self-conscious play with the notion of the pseudonymous *puella* (Is there really a Corinna or not?), it also shows that a female reader of elegy might well be thought to identify with its female characters.

To judge from Ovid himself, his amatory works thus elicit two divergent responses: criticism of their licentious nature on the part of a group of largely unspecified readers (which does, however, include the aging male emperor), but enjoyment and emotional engagement on the part of young men and women, who are presumably attracted by the same erotic aspects that cause the dismay of others. While the poet’s account cannot be taken as an accurate report of contemporary readers’ responses, it does provide an interesting parallel to modern disagreements over Ovid’s poetry and the extent to which his attitudes are or are not thought to be compatible with those of his readers. Obviously, the points of criticism then and now are different: certain ancient critics objected to Ovid’s treatment of sexuality while some modern readers find fault with his depiction of women. There is, however, an intrinsic connection between the two topics, and one that needs to be taken into account in any discussion of the poet’s views on women: in Ovid’s work, women appear almost exclusively in the context of sexuality. Nearly any woman we encounter in his poetry is there as an object of male desire.

That women function as love objects is obvious in the *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*. Both works center on the love of men for their *puellae*, and the whole purpose of Book 3 is to enable women to attract the desire of male lovers. Similarly, the letters of the *Heroides* all revolve around the heroines’ wish to be desired by their addressees, whose absence causes intense anxiety and leads to the obsessive “he loves me ... he loves me

not" found in the letters. Finally, in the *Remedia*, it is the very ability of women to inspire love in men that causes all the problems, which is why Ovid's patients are advised to remove themselves from every possible temptation.

In the less obviously amatory *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, too, the vast majority of women are there to be desired. In fact, a female only needs to enter Ovid's text in order to elicit male ardor. This motivates, among other things, the many rapes of the *Metamorphoses*: as soon as the god in question lays eyes on the nymph or mortal woman, he simply must have her. Ovid delights in pointing out that whatever the woman's appearance, she cannot but please the male observer. Thus, when Apollo sees Daphne's disheveled hair, he is not put off but gets excited at the thought of what it would look like if properly arranged (1.497–8). Even in the most disadvantageous position, a woman is still desirable: though chained to a rock and highly distressed, Andromeda appears so stunningly beautiful to Perseus that he nearly forgets to beat the wings of his sandals and comes close to falling into the sea (4.672–7).

While there are occasional female figures in the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* who do not play erotic roles, and while the exile poetry largely reconfigures erotic desire as desire for Rome (though Ovid's wife still remains an elegiac *puella* of sorts), the fact that most Ovidian women are first and foremost objects of male desire provides an important key to the poet's attitude to the female sex, as well as to the reactions of many readers. Ovid is seriously interested in women, including their feelings and experiences. On the whole, his women are strong characters and are not typically presented as stupid, weak, inferior, or subordinate. However, their primary function in Ovid's universe, and one that they cannot escape however much they try, is to be loved by men. Such a view of women is, of course, one-sided and has the potential to be offensive to some readers. There is no way to argue around the issue: it is up to us readers to decide whether, and to what extent, we let ourselves be bothered by it.

The Man Who Loved Women

To present women as the object of male desire is, in a way, nothing unusual. Females play this role in many literary texts from antiquity, especially, of course, in love poetry, and Ovid's reducing them to this function is not in itself all that remarkable. However, there is a second side to the poet's approach, and one that is less expected within the

cultural context in which the poet was writing. Not only are women in Ovid's work nearly always the object of male desire, but the object of male desire is nearly always a woman.

As scholars working on ancient sexuality over the past few decades have shown, the Greeks and Romans lacked the concept of sexual identity widespread in modern Western societies, according to which we define people, or they define themselves, as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual. By contrast, in the ancient world, sexual acts were primarily distinguished not by the sexes of the partners involved, but by the role that each person played. It was considered perfectly normal – and was indeed expected – for a man to have sexual desires for, and intercourse with, both males and females. However, in order to preserve his status as a proper male, he needed to perform the active role during sex, that is, to penetrate his partner orally, vaginally, or anally. The passive partner was by definition not a “real” man and thus typically a woman, a boy, or a slave. Adult male citizens who were believed to have let themselves be penetrated were subject to ridicule, contempt, and loss of status. The crucial operating terms in assessing a person's sexuality were thus not heterosexual and homosexual, but active and passive. (In what follows, I therefore use “homosexual” and “heterosexual” simply to refer to “same-sex” and “opposite-sex” love, relationships, or intercourse, without any implication of sexual identity in the modern sense.)

That men were assumed to experience desire for both males and females is amply illustrated in Greek and Latin love poetry (a privileged locus for the artistic presentation of male desire), where we find that a longing for both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships is often expressed by one and the same person. Nearly all Latin poets in the generation before Ovid conform to this pattern. Lucretius treats the desire for women and boys together and explains it with the same physiological causes; Catullus in his poetry hankers not only after Lesbia, but also the boy Juventius; shepherds in Vergil's *Eclogues* love not only females like Galatea and Neaera, but also the male Alexis; Horace in his *Odes* addresses a multitude of love interests, both male and female; and the elegies of Tibullus feature not only two *puellae*, Delia and Nemesis, but also a *puer* named Marathus. The only exception appears to be Propertius, who in his elegies presents himself as monomaniacally devoted to one woman, Cynthia. That he is perfectly aware of other options is obvious, however, from poem 1.20, in which he gives advice to a male friend on how to guard his boy against the designs of others, and from 2.4.17–22, where he wistfully opines that relationships with boys are less difficult than those with women.

Ovid wrote his works in the same cultural context, and in the *Metamorphoses*, the expected sexual attitudes apply. Characters experience and act on sexual desire for either or both sexes. Orpheus, for instance, after the ill-fated marriage to his beloved Eurydice, gives up on women and becomes a proponent of boy-love instead. In keeping with the fantastic nature of the work, there are also instances of more outlandish or perverse desires: Narcissus falls in love with himself and Pygmalion with a statue, numerous women couple with animals (nearly always gods in disguise, but not in the case of Pasiphae and the bull), Myrrha sleeps with her father, and Byblis lusts after her brother. Ovid's world of constant flux is a sexual free-for-all.

The same is not true of the more "realistic" amatory poetry, which treats desires and relationships that are nearly exclusively heterosexual, in a manner unusual for classical antiquity. Strikingly, Ovid (or, rather, his persona) is one of very few ancients to express a sexual preference. In the context of discussing his ideal of mutual orgasm in the *Ars amatoria*, he declares:

I dislike intercourse that does not offer release to both partners. This is why I am less attracted by love with boys. (*Ars* 2.683–4)

In this passage, Ovid does not express disapproval of sex with boys nor does he declare himself entirely uninterested in homosexual intercourse. He simply states that he finds it less appealing, offering as a reason the presumed lack of enjoyment on the part of the passive male partner (that boys in pederastic relationships were not supposed to take pleasure in intercourse was a commonplace at the time). However, this mere preference colors the poet's treatment of love in both the *Amores* and *Ars amatoria* in ways that have far-reaching consequences.

Let us return once more to *Am.* 1.1. There, the poet protests at being made an elegist without being in love:

I do not have a subject matter that is appropriate for this lighter meter, neither a boy nor a girl with well-combed long hair. (19–20)

In keeping with the expectations of the audience, Ovid's subject matter and object of desire could be either male or female, a Marathus or a Delia. At this point, the reader is prepared for either or, indeed, both.

When Cupid then shoots Ovid with his arrow, making him fall in love, we might expect to be told who this new elegiac "subject matter" is and whether it is in fact a *puer* or a *puella*. However, Ovid proceeds to involve

his audience in an elaborate tease. He does not make any mention of the object of his desire in *Am.* 1.1 and simply resigns himself to his fate as an elegist. In the next poem, he speaks at length about being in love and giving in to the powers of Cupid – without saying anything about the person with whom he is in love. It is only at the beginning of *Am.* 1.3 that we learn that his love object is in fact a girl, casually introduced in line 1 as *quae me nuper praedata puella est* (“the girl who recently captured me”). The reader’s curiosity is now partially satisfied, but we still do not know who that girl is. Only in 1.5 is she entirely revealed: we are finally told her name, Corinna, and after the lover has ripped off her clothes during foreplay, she stands there, clearly visible in her nakedness. (In a final tease, however, Ovid does not offer any details of their ensuing lovemaking, pulling the curtains with an exasperating “Who does not know the rest?,” 1.5.25.)

Once the object of Ovid’s desire has been revealed to be a woman, same-sex love is excluded from the *Amores*. There is no further mention of the possibility that the lover might take an interest in males; all his efforts are focused on pursuing Corinna and other women. Later in the *Ars*, the heterosexual setup is taken for granted: the teacher addresses himself first to young men interested in capturing women and then to women intent on snaring men. No other options enter the picture, which is especially remarkable since there was an established literary tradition of homosexual erotic teaching. For example, in Tibullus 1.2, the phallic god Priapus offers detailed advice on how to conduct relationships with boys.

The exclusive heterosexual outlook of the *Amores* could be taken as a matter of chance: since the persona happened to fall in love with a woman, just as Propertius fell for Cynthia, his poems logically treat an opposite-sex relationship. However, there seems to be more to Ovid’s choice. Unlike Propertius with his near-pathological devotion to Cynthia, Ovid appears to be in love less with Corinna in particular than with women in general. Many of the poems in the *Amores* are not addressed to Corinna directly, but to an unnamed female addressee, and it has been suggested that the very name Corinna is not a (pretended) pseudonym for one particular woman, but a stand-in for *puella*, with which it is metrically equivalent. It is striking that unlike with the other Greek names of elegiac females, we have no ancient notice concerning the “real” identity of Corinna (while we are told, for example, that Catullus’ “Lesbia” was actually called Clodia; Apuleius, *Apology* 10), and while the name certainly calls to mind that of a famous Greek female poet, we may also etymologize it as derived from Greek *korē*, which means “girl,” that is, *puella*.

Not only is Corinna thus less a specific woman than the archetypal elegiac *puella*, but the lover is also by no means exclusively in love with her. In fact, not only is he quite capable of loving two women at the same time (see *Am.* 2.10, a poem that ends with Ovid's wish to die during intercourse, a death that he says would be a fitting end to his life), but he also admits gleefully that *any* woman is capable of arousing his desire. As he puts it in *Am.* 2.4:

There is no specific appearance that invites my desire: there are a hundred reasons why I am always in love. (9–10)

He goes on for dozens of lines, enumerating the diverse kinds of women who capture his fancy: whether she is modest or shameless, sophisticated or naïve, tall or short, young or old (and so on), Ovid is interested. (This list clearly inspired Mozart's librettist Lorenzo da Ponte to write the famous aria in *Don Giovanni* in which Leporello enumerates the title character's sexual exploits.) The poet sums up:

Finally, all the girls of whom anybody in the city approves, my love has designs on all of them. (47–8)

The same idea recurs in the *Ars amatoria*: Rome is full of girls of all types for the young men to choose from (1.43–66). There is no expectation that they will miraculously fall in love with one particular woman; all women are potentially desirable, and the lover simply has to take his pick.

Ovid's presentation of himself – and, by extension, of all men – as being in love with women *as such* contributes, I suggest, to the development of an important theme in Western literature and culture. If Catullus “invented” the love poem, Ovid invented the “man who loved women” (the phrase is taken from the title of a movie by François Truffaut that features such a character). This type ranges from the everyman who – according to popular belief – thinks of sex every seven seconds and is aroused any time he lays eyes on a woman, to the extraordinary Don Juan, the man whom no woman can resist and who accumulates conquest after conquest. By reducing love to the desire of a man for a woman and by presenting this desire as an unquestioned given, Ovid – whose amatory works, as we will see in chapter 8, played an important role in the formation of European love poetry – thus inadvertently contributed to the creation of the heteronormative code (the idea that all “normal” sexuality is heterosexual) that was to dominate representations of love for many centuries.

Performing Gender

It is Ovid's base assumption in the amatory works that men desire women (and women men), but he would not be Ovid if he did not present the behavior associated with such desires as governed by carefully designed, culturally conditioned rules. While the fundamental act of sex itself may be natural – Ovid gives a funny account of how primitive men and women figured out how to do it without a teacher (*Ars* 2.477–80) – anything leading up to it is a matter of culture and thus of *ars*. In conducting amatory relationships, men and women are expected to play certain roles and artfully perform the kinds of behavior associated with their respective genders.

That gender is not a fixed set of naturally given characteristics, but a fluid identity that is continuously created through performance, is a basic assumption of modern gender studies. While bodies may be physically male or female, agents become masculine or feminine only through their actions. What counts as masculine or feminine at any given moment is determined by cultural as well as personal expectations and varies greatly from place to place and from historical period to historical period. In ancient Rome, for example, Catullus in his famous poem 16 could threaten to prove his masculinity by orally and anally raping two men who had accused him of not being “enough of a man” on account of poems in which he fantasizes about receiving thousands of kisses.

As Ovid explains in the *Ars amatoria*, it is proper masculine behavior to play an active role in the relationship and generally to take the initiative at every stage. The man is to approach the woman and attempt to seduce her, while it is her job to react to his advances. The technical term for the man's approach is the Latin verb *rogare*, literally “asking,” which is typically used in erotic contexts to mean “soliciting favors, making overtures to” (cf. the definition of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*). If the man doesn't take charge of the *rogare* business, the relationship will likely go nowhere:

Ah, that young man is overly confident of his own good looks if he expects that she will ask (*roget*) him first! (1.707–8)

According to the teacher, this masculine taking charge involves physical initiative. At the first date, the man is to start kissing the woman, to which – so Ovid – she will initially offer some fake resistance but which she will ultimately enjoy. However, this is not all:

If someone takes kisses but does not take the rest, that man deserves to lose even what he has gained. (1.669–70)

In other words, Ovid advocates date rape, maintaining in effect that no means yes since “that kind of violence is pleasing to girls” (1.673).

This passage of the *Ars amatoria* is probably the most shocking to modern sensibilities, though ancient readers might have been less outraged by the poet’s stress on the active role expected of the male. It is interesting, however, how Ovid attempts to back up his claim that women approve of being forced in this way. The mythological *exemplum* he chooses to illustrate proper masculine behavior is a story in which a man – and not just any man, but that most masculine hero, Achilles – is dressed up as a woman and acts in a most feminine way (1.681–706). The myth in question is one of the “prequels” to the Trojan War, in which the goddess Thetis, afraid of sending her young son Achilles into battle, disguises him in female dress and hides him on the island of Scyros among the daughters of the local king. There Achilles successfully passes as a woman, even engaging in the most feminine activity of woolwork (691–6). His cover is blown only when he rapes the princess Deidamia, who, however (or so Ovid would have us believe), fell in love with her rapist and was sad when he finally left for the Trojan War after all.

The myth ostensibly proves that women, rather than being distraught at sexual violence, actually approve of it. However, Ovid is at the same time making the point that gender is a performance and that men and women have their proper roles to play. While Achilles was in drag, handling his wool baskets, he was gendered feminine – a highly successful performance but not one appropriate for a Greek warrior. The act that re-establishes the hero’s masculinity is the rape: Deidamia “found out through the rape that he was a man” (*illum stupro comperit esse uirum*, 1.698). We can take this to mean that she physically realized at this point that the supposed girl was anatomically male, but at the same time, the words imply that through his assertive and violent behavior, Achilles showed himself to be masculine, taking the initiative expected of a man.

While advocating gendered behavior that casts the man in an active and the woman in a passive role, Ovid is fully aware that there is nothing natural about this kind of performance and that it is just a cultural convention. In fact, if there were enough of a consensus, the rules of the game could be changed. If the men, weary of always being stuck with the *rogare* part, went on strike and refused to take the initiative in erotic matters, the women might have to take over themselves:

conueniat maribus ne quam nos ante rogemus,
femina iam partes uicta rogantis aget. (1.277–8)

If men agreed not to ask women first, then women would be forced to play the role of the one asking.

The language of the couplet makes it clear that gendered behavior is a convention and a performance: the Latin verb *conueniat* (literally “let it be agreed [by the men]”) is related to the English word “convention,” and *partes ... aget* (“play the role”) is an expression also used for the playing of theatrical parts. Of course, despite his cheeky suggestion of a strike by men fed up with their proper masculine behavior, Ovid in no way disapproves of the performance of culturally defined gender roles. The skillful acting out of masculine and feminine parts is an intrinsic part of his art of love: culture shapes nature, and just as Ovid’s pupils have to be taught to be proper lovers, they also have to be taught to be proper men and women.

Gender is thus a further aspect of the art that dominates Ovid’s cosmos, and a successful gender performance can create its own reality. Achilles did a perfectly good job playing a girl on Scyros and could presumably have gone on doing so if he had not chosen to behave in a masculine fashion instead. There is one character in the *Metamorphoses* who succeeds brilliantly at performing a gender that is at odds with her natural sex. The girl Iphis (*Met.* 9.666–797), conveniently furnished with a gender-neutral name, is raised as a boy by her mother in order to circumvent her father’s order that a female child be exposed at birth. From childhood, Iphis is betrothed to the girl Ianthe, with whom she duly falls in love, and vice versa. The approach of the wedding, and specifically the wedding night, causes her obvious anxiety: while her cultural masculinity is beyond question, she lacks physical maleness, a problem of which the bride Ianthe is happily unaware, thinking “that the one whom she believes to be a man [on account of her displayed masculinity] will be a man [that is, will demonstrate maleness in the sexual act]” (723). By contrast, Iphis “loves her whom she despairs of ever being able to enjoy [sexually]” (724).

Caught between nature and culture, Iphis is saved by a prayer to the goddess Isis by her mother (the only other person aware of Iphis’ problem). As mother and daughter leave the temple, Iphis appears ever so slightly changed: her footsteps are wider, her face is less white and soft, her hair is shorter, and she is generally stronger (786–90). From a girl, she has turned into a boy, a change that – to the outward viewer

– is extremely subtle, given how masculine she was even before. The wedding takes place on the next day, and Iphis is happily able to do the proper male thing: he “takes possession” (*potitur*, 797) of Ianthe.

As scholars have pointed out, the story of Iphis is similar to that of Pygmalion, which is told shortly afterwards in *Metamorphoses* 10. Both characters are highly accomplished “artists,” Pygmalion as a sculptor, Iphis in his/her performance of gender. Their creations are so close to nature as to deceive the viewer – Pygmalion himself nearly believes his own statue to be alive, Ianthe has no doubt concerning the sex of her betrothed – and it is only the artists themselves who are tortured by the minute slippage between their art and reality. Enter the *deus ex machina* to close the gap: both Pygmalion and Iphis find themselves rewarded by seeing their work of art come to life.

In Ovid’s universe, there is thus a continuum of cultural practices that ranges from traditional arts such as sculpture to the proper interaction of the genders as codified in the poet’s *Art of Love*. To return to this chapter’s topic of women, it is true, in a sense, that in Ovid’s work females are often the artful creations of men, whether literally, as in Pygmalion’s ivory wife, or figuratively, as in the elegiac *puella* who exists only as a subject matter for the lover’s poetry. At the same time, however, Ovid stresses that women, just like men, are very much their own creations. Ultimately, we are all artists, fashioning our identities, including those of gender, and our worlds of social interaction.

Rome

In *Tr.* 5.7, bewailing the fact that he is forced to use the local language when trying to make himself understood at Tomis, Ovid pointedly calls himself a “Roman poet” (*Romanus uates*, 55). Though he occasionally mentions his pride in his Paelignian roots and hometown Sulmo, Ovid identifies closely with the city of Rome, which plays a central role in his poetry. In the *Ars amatoria*, Rome is the stage on which the drama of the genders is being performed; in the *Fasti* (and, to a lesser extent, the *Metamorphoses*), Roman history is brought alive and shown to be an integral part of the present; and the exile poems keep conjuring up the image of the city now so painfully lost.

This Rome whose poet Ovid proclaims himself to be is also always the Rome of someone else: the emperor Augustus. His buildings provide the backdrop for the lovers’ trysts in the *Ars*, his role in and appropriation of history inform Ovid’s presentation of the Roman past and present, and of course he was the man responsible for banning the poet from the city. Ovid’s relationship to Rome is intrinsically connected to his relationship to the man believed to embody Roman destiny, and this chapter will therefore treat the two together.

There is no scholarly consensus concerning Ovid’s attitude to Augustus. Views range from considering the poet “Augustan,” that is, in basic optimistic agreement with the emperor’s ideology; to regarding him as “anti-Augustan,” that is, decidedly critical of the regime; to believing that he is fundamentally “un-Augustan,” that is, uninterested in the emperor’s concerns and intent on fashioning a work set apart from the political sphere. Most scholars are well aware that such terms as Augustan and anti-Augustan are overly simplistic and that Ovid’s relationship to

the emperor was most likely complex and quite possibly changed over time – just as “Augustanism” itself was anything but monolithic and immutable. Nevertheless, the question remains to what extent, if any, Ovid was opposed to or at least ambivalent about Augustus and expressed such views and feelings in his poetry. The issue, of course, gains particular poignancy from the fact that the poet did end up in some kind of conflict with the emperor, as witnessed by his exile.

In a way, Ovid was the most “Augustan” of the so-called Augustan poets: nearly his entire adult life was spent under the monarchic rule of Rome’s first emperor. The poet was only twelve years old when Octavian defeated Mark Antony in the Battle of Actium (31 BCE) and not quite sixteen when he ostentatiously “restored” the Republic and took the honorific title of Augustus in 27 BCE, a date traditionally taken as the beginning of the emperor’s reign. Unlike Vergil, Horace, and Propertius, who had all personally suffered from the Civil War and retained vivid memories of this harrowing period, Ovid spent his youth secure in the peace that Augustus had established. The stability and prosperity of life at Rome was not a new state of affairs for Ovid – as it was for his older contemporaries – but simply the world as he knew it. A genuine product of the Augustan age, he was thus much less likely to view Augustus as some kind of disruption, as either a peace-bringing savior or a sinister destroyer of freedom. Ovid’s was the first generation for whom Augustus, and the Rome he had created, were intrinsically normal.

In what follows, I will first take a look at Ovid’s treatment of “his” city, before focusing more closely on the poet’s depiction of Augustus and his achievements. His most “anti-Augustan” passages occur in his early amatory work, where the emperor’s marriage laws are openly held up to ridicule. By contrast, most mentions of Augustus in Ovid’s later poetry (the *Metamorphoses*, *Fasti*, and exile poems) are ostensibly celebratory – which has, however, not deterred critics from detecting subversive undertones in them as well.

The Poet of the City

Ovid’s attachment to the city of Rome and his attraction to all aspects of urban life are most apparent in two sets of works that are divided in time and, at least on the surface, quite different in outlook. In the *Ars amatoria*, the poet’s technique of love is a specifically Roman art whose pursuit is grounded in the city, both physically and ideologically. In the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto*, by contrast, the absent city is the object

of longing, whose presence is conjured up by a poet who creates a virtual Rome in his verse.

The *Ars amatoria* is not only “set” in Rome, but explicitly presents instructions for contemporary Roman men and women. In keeping with his idea of love as a cultural practice, Ovid maintains that his teaching is appropriate for a particular time and place – Augustan Rome – while not applicable to others. As he puts it,

I am not teaching girls from the Caucasian rock and those who drink your waters, Mysian Caycus river. (*Ars* 3.195–6)

If he were instructing uncivilized foreigners, Ovid would have to enter into such basics as deodorants and depilation, topics with which Roman women are already familiar. Similarly, if his students in Book 3 were *puellae* from an earlier stage in Roman history, there would be no need to keep harping on *cultus*: that sort of sophistication was, alas, considered unnecessary in the past (3.107–8).

In following Ovid’s instructions, the young men and women move through the physical city of Augustan Rome, using its buildings and events as the settings for their erotic encounters. When advising the men on where to find women, Ovid produces a veritable catalogue of Roman monuments (1.67–88), many of which were particularly associated with Augustus and his family. The same is true for the special occasions that offer fertile amatory hunting grounds: games – whether theatrical (1.89–134), in the circus (1.135–62), or gladiatorial (1.163–70) – are generally excellent pick-up places, and special shows and pageants put on by the emperor provide similar opportunities. Ovid gives an enthusiastic review of a mock naval battle (a re-enactment of the Battle of Salamis) staged by Augustus in 2 BCE (1.171–6), which offered an amazing array of eligible girls among the spectators. Likewise, he eagerly anticipates the triumph of Gaius Caesar (1.177–228), which will give his male students ample opportunity to strike up conversations with women in the audience.

The fact that Rome is the capital of an empire that attracts people from all over the world works in the lover’s favor. There is no need ever to leave the city since there is a steady influx of desirable women:

Rome will give you so many and such beautiful girls that you will say:
“This city has whatever there is in the world.” (1.55–6)

Ovid is here alluding to the proverbial collocation of *urbs* (“city,” i.e., Rome) and *orbis* (“world”), a pun that he repeats when speaking about

the staged naval battle, which brought so many foreign spectators to Rome that “the immense world (*orbis*) was there in the city (*in urbe*)” (1.174).

The prosperity, power, and splendor of Augustan Rome are what enables the lifestyle that is reflected in and intrinsically part of Ovid’s art of love. The poet is well aware that he is living in a golden age of opportunities. In his famous recommendation of *cultus* at the beginning of *Ars* 3, he states:

Previously, there was primitive simplicity; now, Rome is golden and possesses the great riches of the conquered world. (3.113–14)

Rome’s greatness is apparent in the magnificence of its buildings: Ovid mentions specifically the temples of Capitoline Jupiter and Palatine Apollo, both of which were associated with Augustus’ building program. He then continues with an enthusiastic endorsement of modern Rome:

Let the past please others. I congratulate myself on having been born at this very moment: this age is fitting for my character. (3.121–2)

The reason, he hastens to add, is not the overblown luxury of the present (123–6) but the pervading influence of *cultus*, which has replaced the unfortunate rusticity of earlier periods (127–8).

Augustus boasted of having found a city of brick and turned it into a city of marble (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 28). It is this city – the mistress of an empire, the home of sophistication, the optimal playing ground for love – that Ovid celebrates in the *Ars*. Through his “rhetoric of the city” (to use a formulation of the Italian Latinist Mario Labate⁷), he re-creates the *urbs* in his readers’ mind, establishing a powerful image of Augustan Rome. It is thus not simply the case that the poet appropriates the emperor’s city for his own purposes: rather, as a part of the Augustan discourse himself, he contributes to creating the concept of the golden city in the first place.

This process continues in the *Fasti*, which – though primarily concerned with Roman time – is also a poem about the city of Rome and the complex associations of its individual places. Just as the poet moves through the year, he also moves through the city, uncovering layers of religious, historical, and political meaning wherever he goes. Every monument, every ritual has one or often multiple stories attached to it, and by telling or alluding to them, Ovid creates a kaleidoscopic image of “Rome,” a Rome that is an actual city but also a complex and deeply meaningful idea.

Parts of the *Fasti* were written in Tomis, and it is in the exile poetry that Ovid's idealization of Rome reaches its peak. The very first poem of *Tristia* 1 is the poet's address to his book, which will have the pleasure of going to Rome, "alas, where your master is not allowed to go" (*Tr.* 1.1.2). The same conceit appears in *Tr.* 3.1, only on this occasion the book is speaking itself, describing among other things how upon its arrival in the city, a man it encounters (one of the few willing to engage with a work by Ovid) shows it around as though it were a tourist, pointing out significant monuments. The counterpart to these scenes of arrival in the city – not on the part of the poet, but on the part of the book that is his surrogate – is *Tr.* 1.3, a poem that gives a heartrending description of the night that was Ovid's "very last time in the city" (1.3.2). It is telling that his primary loss is that of the *urbs*, to which he bids farewell in a moving address to the Capitoline gods, the city's tutelary divinities (29–34). For Ovid, leaving Rome is tantamount to being torn from himself (73–4) or even to death (89). When he describes the mourning and desperation in his household as similar to the sack of Troy (25–6), he not only elevates his own suffering and that of his family to epic heights (the *exemplum* implies that Ovid himself is a second Aeneas), but also makes the dramatic point that for him, Rome (the second Troy) has virtually been destroyed.

Once Ovid is stuck in Tomis, which in his eyes is defined by the absence of everything Roman (peace, urbanity, society, the Latin language, etc.), Rome itself becomes a city of the imagination. He tells his friend Severus in *Pont.* 1.8:

Don't think Naso is longing for the comforts of urban life – but still, he is! For sometimes I remember you, sweet friends, and sometimes my daughter and my sweet wife come to mind. And then again I turn from my family to the places of the beautiful city, and my mind sees everything, using its own eyes. Now the fora, the temples, the marble-covered theaters appear to me, now again a whole portico on leveled ground, now the grass of the Campus Martius that opens up to beautiful gardens, now the pools and the water of the Aqua Virgo. (29–38)

As in the *Ars amatoria*, however, it is not only the topography of the city and its attractive buildings and open spaces that define Rome for Ovid. Public events and spectacles are another aspect of the urban fabric of which the poet longs to be part. This is apparent from three poems (*Tr.* 4.2; *Pont.* 2.1 and 3.4) in which he "describes" triumphs (of Tiberius) that Ovid has heard took place at Rome or imagines others (of Tiberius or Germanicus) that will be celebrated in the future. These poems are

openly panegyric and presumably intended to gain the favor of the imperial family by advertising what Ovid's poetic talent can do to celebrate Julio-Claudian achievement. At the same time, however, they are expressions of the poet's nostalgia, his wish to "be there" and participate in such festive events that enhance the splendor of Rome – just as the lovers of the *Ars amatoria* were imagined as being present in the crowd at the anticipated triumph of Gaius Caesar.

The story of Ovid told by the poet's work is the story of a man fundamentally at home in contemporary, Augustan Rome. He is at home in the city not only because Rome is where he lives, but also, and more significantly, in the sense that he wholeheartedly approves of and believes in the city – as he conceives of it and, crucially, represents it in his poetry. To be forcefully evicted from this home is thus a traumatic experience, and he continues to make desperate efforts to keep up a connection, however tenuous, to the place where he feels he belongs or, as he puts it in *Tr.* 3.4.14, "the city where I *should* be."

Pimping for Rome

The problem with the story of Ovid the "Roman poet" is that the version of Augustan Rome that the poet devised as "fitting for [his] character" was not the Rome that Augustus himself was trying to create. While the emperor could not control the many conflicting images of "his" city and probably had no desire to do so, he apparently found it convenient to seize on Ovid's deviant version as a welcome pretense for the poet's banishment, making his presumed teaching of adultery an official reason for his exile. What exactly was it that Ovid did that laid him open to this charge and what, if anything, does this tell us about the poet's attitude to the emperor who ultimately became his nemesis?

In an effort to improve public morals and restock the Roman upper classes depleted by the Civil War, Augustus in 18 BCE passed his marriage laws, among them the *lex Iulia de adulteriis* (Julian Law on Adultery). Adultery, or extramarital sexual activity of a married woman (NB: not man), had previously been considered a private matter but now gained the status of a crime that had to be prosecuted in court. If convicted, both the woman and her lover faced relegation – to different places, for obvious reasons. If the husband had profited from his wife's relationship or even simply tolerated it, he was subject to prosecution as well.

The existence of this law explains why the charge of teaching adultery could be leveled against Ovid. For this reason, the poet, well versed in legal matters, had made an effort to protect himself against such accusations. As he explains to Augustus in *Tristia* 2, although the *Ars* may be playful and frivolous:

Nevertheless, it is not therefore contrary to the orders of the law and does not instruct married Roman women. Lest you doubt for whom I write, one of the three books has these four lines: "Be far off, thin headbands, sign of chastity, and long hem that touches the middle of the feet. I sing only of what is lawful and of thefts that are allowed, and there will be no crime in my song." (243–50)

Ovid here quotes verbatim from the beginning of *Ars* 1 (31–4), one of a few passages in which he explicitly excludes married women from the target audience of his didactic poem. Rather than at wives, his teachings, he says, are directed at freedwomen courtesans, who do not fall under the law (3.483–4 and 615–16). (There is a small problem here in that we do not have independent testimony that freedwomen were in fact excluded from the *lex Iulia*, though these very passages might be taken as evidence that they were.)

Ovid has thus covered himself, and the fact that no action was taken against him for eight years after the appearance of the *Ars* shows that the poem was not considered a serious infringement of the law. Since the real reason for the poet's banishment appears to have been the hushed-up *error*, the *carmen* was probably trotted out for the purpose of giving Augustus a more "presentable" cause for outrage. For even if Ovid could rightfully maintain that he had not set out to "teach adultery," it is nonetheless true that not only the *Ars*, but the *Amores*, too, are full of less than respectful allusions to Augustus' law.

One source of Ovid's risqué humor is the fact that Latin used the vocabulary of marriage also to describe nonmarital erotic relationships. The boyfriend of an elegiac *puella* could thus be described as her *uir* ("man," sometimes also used to mean "husband") or even *maritus* ("husband"), while the woman herself could be referred to as *coniunx* ("spouse") or *uxor* ("wife"). The looseness of these terms allows Ovid to appear to be talking about marriage in cases when he technically is not. Numerous double entendres are found in Ovid's two outrageous poems to his rival, *Am.* 2.19 (where the man is advised to guard his girlfriend) and 3.4 (where he is told to do the opposite). In the second

poem, the kind of man who is concerned about his girl's fidelity is derided as old-fashioned:

He who is bothered by an adulterous wife (*adultera coniunx*) is all too unsophisticated and does not quite understand how things are done at Rome. (37–8)

Addressed to a man with whom the lover is vying over the favor of a courtesan, these words might be acceptable, but the way they are formulated makes it sound as though Ovid not only advocates adultery but considers it a specifically Roman and urbane form of behavior.

In 2.19, the poet's tack is the opposite. Here the "husband" is urged to properly protect his "wife" and reprimanded for being too permissive: "You are passive and tolerate what no husband (*maritus*) should tolerate" (51). This lack of resistance leads to the lover's losing all interest in the too easily available woman. Exasperated, he exclaims: "What am I to do with a husband who is easygoing and plays the pimp?" (57). The phrase *leno maritus* ("pimping husband") is especially cheeky since it picks up on the wording of the Julian Law, which forbade husbands from "pimping" for their wives, that is, from profiting from their adultery or even just tolerating it. But it is this very type of social and financial benefit that Ovid recommends to the rival at the close of 3.4:

And cultivate those friends your wife gives you (she'll give you many): this way you'll reap great benefit with minimum effort. You'll always be able to attend the parties of young people and will see many gifts in your house that you didn't give. (45–8)

Thus, in *Am.* 2.19, Ovid implores the "husband" to adhere to the *lex Iulia*, while in *Am.* 3.4, he urges him to break it.

In the *Ars*, as we have seen, Ovid goes to great lengths to stress that his teaching stays within the confines of the law (which he specifically mentions in 3.58 and 614). The repeated claim that he is not instructing wives, however, has in a way the opposite effect of continuously keeping the possibility of adulterous affairs within sight. The poet's assurance that there will be "no crime in [his] song" (1.34) is likewise tongue in cheek since the Latin contains a clever pun: there will be no *crimen in carmine*, but of course the word *carmine* itself contains the letters of *crimen*. In addition, while ostentatiously upholding the sanctity of marriage, Ovid makes it all too clear that – compared to the relationships conducted according to his art of love – married life holds little appeal. Sex with

one's wife is no fun since her constant availability for intercourse means that she may not actually want it (3.585–6); if one is unlucky, the virtuous wife will simply close her eyes and “think of her woolwork” (2.686). Arguments between husband and wife are also unavoidable (2.153–6); in fact, “quarrel is a wife's dowry” (155).

Finally, although adultery is banned from Ovid's teaching as such, it re-enters the *Ars* in many mythological *exempla*, where the poet typically treats it with indulgence. Thus, Pasiphae is criticized for her choice of adulterer (a bull) rather than for the act of adultery itself (1.303–10), and the affair of Venus and Mars elicits not only (as in Homer, *Odyssey* 8.334–43) the wish of the other male gods to exchange places with the adulterer (2.585–6), but also the teacher's advice to the tattletale Sungod to blackmail Venus into granting sexual favors to him as well (575–6). Most daring is Ovid's take on the story of Paris' seduction of Helen (2.359–72). In the expressed opinion of the teacher of love, the fault lies squarely with Menelaus: why did he have to leave his wife alone in their house with a handsome stranger? Addressing the hapless husband, he concludes:

By providing a place and a time, you force the adultery. What did the girl do but follow your advice? What should she do? Her husband is away, that not unsophisticated stranger is here, and she is afraid of sleeping alone in an empty bed. It's Menelaus' problem; I absolve Helen from the crime. Her humane husband accommodated her, she made use of it. (367–72)

Menelaus, it seems, was just another pimping husband.

The references to the *lex Iulia de adulteriis* in both the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria* are obvious, and it is clear that Ovid delights in making fun of the law by applying its language to such incongruous contexts as relationships with courtesans and mythological tales – and by both mockingly endorsing it and daringly advocating its violation. It is harder to decide whether the poet's irreverence is intended simply to be amusing or whether Ovid actually means to criticize the legislation, either for its encroachment on citizens' private affairs or because of the emperor's hypocrisy (Augustus himself was a notorious adulterer; Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 69.1–2). It is also next to impossible to tell how risky the poet's behavior was; years later, the *Ars* turned out to be a handy pretense for the poet's exile, but then again, it may not have been more than a pretense, and nothing happened to the poet when the poems were first published. We also do not know how isolated or not Ovid's mockery of the law was. Maybe all of Rome was telling *leno maritus* jokes?

In many, perhaps all cultures, sex is an object of humor, and so too are the actions of the authorities, especially under more repressive regimes. Any official attempt to regulate sexual behavior provides an obvious source for jokes, and I suggest that Ovid, rather than being outraged by the Julian Law, simply recognized its comic potential, especially within his chosen genres of erotic writing. Making fun of something does not yet amount to criticizing it, and both Ovid and his readers perhaps simply thought that, for example, the concept of the pimping husband was hilarious. Maybe even Augustus could see the fun in it, at least initially. But once both his daughter Julia had been convicted of adultery in 2 BCE (just as his granddaughter would be nine years later) and his reign had entered its final rocky period, the emperor may have been rather less amused.

The Problem with Panegyric

If we are looking for Ovidian opposition to or at least irreverence toward Augustus and the values he sought to promote, the poet's poking fun at the *lex Iulia* is the obvious candidate. The majority of Ovid's other engagements with the emperor are passages that at least on the face of it celebrate Augustus or otherwise seek to present him in a positive light. At the end of the *Metamorphoses*, the poet compares the emperor favorably to his already outstanding (adoptive) father Julius Caesar and anticipates his apotheosis, while expressing the hope that the day when Augustus leaves the earth may still be far off (15.850–70). The *Fasti* represents itself explicitly as a celebration of the “altars of *Caesar*” (1.13); as the poet assures Augustus in the proem to Book 2, “with eager heart I pursue your fame as my topic” (2.15–16). Finally, the exile poetry for obvious reasons abounds in often extravagant exaltations of Augustus, the only person with the power to recall the poet to Rome.

Scholars have differed widely on how to read such passages. Is Ovid sincerely praising Augustus? Is he just going through the motions of panegyric, which he thought would be expedient? Or is there a subversive subtext to his overtly positive presentation of the emperor and is Ovid really criticizing Augustus, or at least expressing ambivalence?

There is no doubt that Ovid *can* be read as anti-Augustan – as he so often has been, especially in recent criticism. However, most scholars who pursue the issue would like to determine whether Ovid himself intended his poetry to be understood as critical and whether his contemporary

audience took it this way. The matter is complicated, of course, by the fact that the historical author's intention is difficult if not impossible to assess and that authors often are not conscious of the effects they create. As for the original audience, we know very little about it and its reactions and we should at any rate assume that there must have been a wide spectrum of reader responses. Finally, both the opinions and feelings of Ovid himself and those of his audience were probably complex, conflicted, and unstable over time.

We should also keep in mind that modern readers cannot but bring their own assumptions to bear on the text. Concerning the question at hand (Ovid's relation to Augustus), it is probably fair to say that many current scholars have a negative view of Augustus, which, perhaps unconsciously, they would like Ovid to share. In addition, readers today are understandably wary of panegyric, a mode of expression alien to us, and thus have a tendency to assume that such ruler praise must be insincere. And in the case of Ovid, there is, finally, the undeniable fact that Augustus ruined the poet's life by exiling him to Tomis, which would appear to suggest that the poet was antagonistic to the emperor before his banishment and hated him afterwards.

The hermeneutic problems just outlined – the difficulty of assessing authorial intent and original reader response coupled with the preconceptions of modern readers – in a way apply to each and every aspect of the interpretation of Ovid's (and every other) text. Thus, for example, every interpretive claim this book has made can be deconstructed along these lines. Still, some issues are more difficult to decide than others, as witnessed by the fact that these engender more scholarly controversy. Most critics would probably agree that the poet's interaction with Cupid in *Am.* 1.1 is in some way a rewriting of the epiphany of Apollo in Callimachus' *Aetia* prologue, but there is far less consensus about Ovid's treatment of women and his attitude to Augustus (partly, but not exclusively, because these are topics in which readers feel they have more of a personal stake).

To illustrate some of the problems with trying to assess the tone of Ovid's praise of Augustus, let us consider a passage that has often been viewed as a piece of self-undermining panegyric. In *Fast.* 2.119–44, the poet celebrates the anniversary of the award of the title *pater patriae* to the emperor, culminating with the claim that Augustus, the true “father of the fatherland,” surpasses even Romulus, the original founder of Rome. Ovid illustrates his point with a detailed comparison of the two rulers:

Romulus, you will concede: this man [Augustus] makes your walls great by protecting them; you gave them to Remus to jump over. Tatius and small Cures and Caenina experienced your might; under his leadership, sunset and sunrise are Roman. You had some tiny bit of conquered land; Caesar has whatever there is under the high sky. You rape, he orders married women to be chaste under his rule. You receive crime in your grove, he expels it. To you, violence was dear; under Caesar, laws flourish. You had the title of master, he of leader (*princeps*). Remus accuses you, he grants clemency to enemies. Your father made you a god, he made a god of his. (2.133–44)

On the face of it, this is extravagant praise: on every count, Augustus wins over Romulus, the deified and revered city founder. In this context, it is interesting to realize that the emperor first considered using “Romulus” as an honorific title, with the purpose of stressing his own role as the city’s second founder, before settling on Augustus instead (Suetonius, *Life of Augustus* 7.2; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 53.16.7–8).

On second thought, however, there is something incongruous about the passage. The extended point-by-point comparison of Augustus and Romulus, which sounds like the scorekeeping for a game, seems ridiculous, especially coupled with the cheerful exhortation to Romulus to be sporting and concede already. It is also striking how poor a competition Romulus is for Augustus: his tiny scrap of a kingdom is decidedly unimpressive, and his credentials as a rapist, abetter of crime, and fratricide hardly recommend him. Of course, Augustus looks good by comparison, but how much of an achievement is it to win round after round over so obviously inferior an opponent?

The negative depiction of Romulus here is in keeping with Ovid’s treatment of Rome’s first king throughout the *Fasti*. As the founder of the city and, incidentally, inventor of the first Roman calendar, Romulus is obviously an important figure, but he comes across as violent, uncouth, and none too bright: his calendar, for instance, has only ten months and is thus hopelessly out of sync with the solar year. By contrast, Ovid builds up Romulus’ successor, Numa Pompilius, as a positive character who brought laws and (important for the *Fasti*) religious rites to Rome, while also fixing the calendar, to which he added the missing two months. If Ovid had compared Augustus positively to Numa, that would have been a compliment; his comparison with Romulus seems to miss the panegyric point.

So what are we to make of this passage? There are a number of interpretive possibilities:

(1) Ovid genuinely intended to praise Augustus (either out of heartfelt admiration or for artistic and/or purely pragmatic reasons) and believed the comparison with Romulus to be an effective way of doing so. Contemporary readers, including Augustus, thought so as well, taking the passage to be straightforwardly complimentary. (Of course, we do not know who got to read the *Fasti* and when. It is unlikely that Augustus himself ever saw the poem, but let us pretend for the sake of argument that he did.) In this case, the interpretive problem would exist only in the eyes of the modern reader.

(2) Ovid genuinely intended to praise Augustus but had no talent for panegyric. He did not realize that the comparison with Romulus was ridiculous, but at least some contemporary readers did, perhaps including Augustus. (We may here imagine the emperor adding yet another stroke on his own score card against the already suspect poet.)

(3) Ovid did not intend to praise Augustus and deliberately used the comparison with Romulus, whether to make fun of the emperor or otherwise to criticize, or at least express ambivalence about, his monarchic rule. The overtly panegyric tone of the passage would have acted as a cover: some people, perhaps including Augustus, would have taken Ovid's praise at face value, while more discerning readers would have detected the hidden subtext. As in the case of the disclaimers in the *Ars amatoria*, the poet could always have maintained that his intentions were pure and that he was attempting nothing other than a celebration of the emperor.

These three approaches, or variations thereof, are probably the ones most often adopted by modern readers. However, there is also a fourth one that should not be disregarded:

(4) Ovid genuinely intended to praise Augustus but wanted to do so in an original way. Panegyric easily runs the risk of being boring and repetitive (when the same achievements are enumerated and praised again and again) and of giving the impression of insincerity (Is the person doing the praising just going through the motions?). In order to avoid such pitfalls, the poet settled on a cheeky blow-by-blow contest between a roguish Romulus and a saintly Augustus. He intended it to be funny – including to the emperor – while also genuinely expressing praise of the ruler. Sophisticated readers at the time – again, perhaps including

Augustus – would have appreciated the poet's wit and his ability to be both complimentary and clever.

I myself would tend toward this fourth scenario, while freely admitting that none of the other three can be excluded. We simply do not know enough about the attitudes and reading habits at the time to make a clear decision. Perhaps original audience responses were as varied as scholarly readings are today. And perhaps (though, again, perhaps not) this openness of the text and its ability to inspire different interpretations were deliberately devised by Ovid himself.

Once we come to the exile poetry, I believe that complete agnosticism is in order. Of course, it is obvious that by this point, Ovid's relationship with Augustus was, to put it mildly, highly fraught. However, since we have no clear idea of why Ovid was exiled and what Augustus' grievance against him was, it is very hard to judge the tone, and possible subtext, of the poetry from this period. If we knew for certain that Ovid considered himself an innocent victim and Augustus an unreasonable tyrant, we would read the exilic work in one way; but if it were established that the poet felt himself to be guilty of a serious offense and regarded the emperor's reaction as justified, we would experience it quite differently. It would also make a huge difference to know how Ovid's various addressees viewed the banishment and how well they were informed about its background. Finally, what did Augustus himself think? How important were Ovid and his poetry to him? Had he really been deeply upset by the poet's *error* and did he now carefully scrutinize Ovid's new works to gauge his repentance? Or was the poet to him but a minor nuisance who had been shipped off to the Black Sea and was then happily forgotten? As long as we are completely in the dark about the circumstances, it is next to impossible to assess the complexities of the picture of the emperor that we find in the *Tristia*, the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, and the *Ibis*.

Keeping all this in mind, I suggest that we read the praise of Augustus, and Ovid's own debasement before the ruler, primarily as attempts on the part of the poet to get himself recalled to Rome. Given this overarching purpose, I consider it unlikely that such panegyric passages contain hidden barbs against the emperor, as some scholars have suggested, though it is certainly possible that Ovid's real feelings unconsciously colored his verse. What these real feelings were, we do not know. Perhaps the poet hated Augustus with a vengeance (as proposed, among others, by critics who believe that the real addressee of the *Ibis* was Augustus – or that the poem at least gave Ovid an opportunity to vent his violent

feelings). Probably, though, he felt a range of conflicting emotions, from resentment to anger to regret to fear to hope and beyond. It is also possible that – as the classical scholar and translator Peter Green has suggested⁸ – in terms of his relationship with Augustus, Ovid suffered from a kind of “Stockholm syndrome,” the survival mechanism by which victims of crimes (in modern times, often kidnappings or hijackings) paradoxically form emotional attachments to the very perpetrators who have brought about their predicaments and who are the only ones with the power to end them.

In the end, of course, all of Ovid’s appeals were in vain, and neither Augustus nor his successor Tiberius allowed the poet to return to Rome. While the exile poems mirror their author’s despair, there is also a defiant streak. Though the emperor has deprived Ovid of everything, he has not been able to take away his poetry, which will ensure his everlasting fame:

Look at me: though I am without my fatherland and without you [i.e., the poem’s addressee, Ovid’s stepdaughter, as well as his wife] and without my family, and everything that could have been taken away from me has been, still I enjoy the company of my talent (*ingenium*) – Caesar could not have any power over this. Let anyone end this life of mine with a savage sword: even after my death, my fame will survive, and as long as victorious Rome, the city of Mars, looks from her hills at the whole conquered world, I will be read. (*Tr.* 3.7.45–52)

The emperor has only limited power over the poet and only limited power over Rome. Rome will persist and so will the fame of the *Romanus uates*, Publius Ovidius Naso.

Reception

In the nearly two millennia since his death, Ovid has never ceased to find and fascinate an audience. Depending on the period, the place, and the circumstances, the poet has meant many different things to a vast number of diverse people: the Roman authors of the Imperial age imitated his style and meter; medieval schoolteachers placed his work at the center of their curriculum; love poets of all ages either aligned themselves with, or took care to distance themselves from, the experiences of the Ovidian *amator* and instructions of the *praeceptor amoris*; any artist who wished to treat, in whatever medium, a story of myth or metamorphosis turned to Ovid as a source; and from late antiquity to the present day, political and other exiles have used the poet's final works as inspiration and comfort. For all the differences among the modes of his reception – people not only engaged with Ovid's work by reading it in Latin or in translation, but also encountered it in poems, plays, novels, paintings, sculptures, and pieces of music – the poet's prediction that he would remain on the “lips of the people” has spectacularly come true.

Given the multiformity of the reactions to our multiform poet through the ages, it would be impossible to attempt in this chapter to give even a highly compressed overview of Ovid's afterlife in Western culture. What I will do instead is present three representative chapters from the continuing “story of Ovid,” concentrating on three aspects of the poet's reception that have to do with different facets of the Ovidian persona, but also with different time periods and artistic media. I first consider Ovid's continuing career as a lover and teacher of love, focusing on Latin verse from the Middle Ages. My second episode revolves around the challenge faced by Renaissance and Baroque artists to depict in paint or marble the process of metamorphosis that Ovid had so masterfully captured in

language. And finally, I take a look at how the enduring enigma of the poet's exile has inspired late 20th- and early 21st-century novelists in different countries to produce a diverse body of "Ovid novels."

The Gospel of Love

As mentioned in the Introduction, Ovid was so popular in the Middle Ages that the phrase *aetas Ovidiana* is now conventionally used to refer to the 12th and 13th centuries, a period when his Latin style was especially influential. Thanks to the fact that the poet's works were school texts employed in the teaching of Latin grammar, Ovid's poetry was widely known among the educated elite, engaging the imagination of his medieval readers in a number of ways. First, there was a fascination with the details of Ovid's life: the poet's exile offered a model and means of identification for intellectuals who found themselves in a situation of either real or spiritual banishment, while the mystery surrounding Ovid's departure to the Black Sea gave rise to pleasantly sordid speculations about its reason (adultery with the younger Julia was a favorite scenario, as was Ovid's catching Augustus *in flagrante delicto* with a male lover). While the *Metamorphoses* presented a treasure trove of stories to be reused and reconfigured in various ways, it also inspired the search for hidden meaning behind tales that to medieval minds often appeared frivolous if not downright blasphemous. Ovid could thus be cast in the role of the sage who in his mythological poem had disguised his teachings about the nature of things under the drapery of beautiful poetry, just as in his amatory works, he had endeavored to impart instructions about the proper conduct in love.

Perhaps surprisingly, the *Ars amatoria* was one of Ovid's most popular works in the Middle Ages. The didactic nature of the poem appealed to medieval readers, who – unlike many more recent critics – found the idea that love can, and should be, taught both reasonable and attractive. As the classicist and medievalist Ralph Hexter points out, "the two things medieval readers and writers liked most was to love and to learn,"⁹ and Ovid was an excellent guide for both. Readers would emerge from their study of the *Ars amatoria* well versed in Latin grammar and vocabulary and at the same time well equipped for the game of love.

As the poet – who in the *Ars* so blatantly advertises his own skills as *praeceptor amoris* – would no doubt have relished, Ovid in the Middle Ages achieved the status of the proverbial teacher of love. It is in this role that he is depicted in Chaucer's *House of Fame* (14th C.):

... on a piler was
 Of coper, Venus clerk Ovide,
 That hath ysowen wonder wyde
 The grete god of Loves name. (1486–9)

The idea that the poet holds a quasi-official function as *the* authority in amatory matters is developed further in satirical contexts, where Ovid is cheekily presented as having taken over roles traditionally assigned to the church. He thus appears as “Pope” in a playful poem found in a 12th-century manuscript in which an unidentified speaker rebukes a jealous priest, who unreasonably expects that his woman will be faithful to him alone. After a pastiche of Ovidian lines and pieces of advice from the *Ars amatoria*, the text concludes,

Hoc in decretis pape Nasonis habetur,
 quod mulier plures possit habere viros.
 Hoc tu decretum firmum sub pectore serva,
 ne sis catholica pulsus ab ecclesia. (37–40)

This is held in the decrees of Pope Ovid, viz. that a woman can have multiple men. Keep this decree firmly in mind, lest you be expelled from the Catholic church.

Ovid appears in a similar function in the *Love Council of Remiremont*, an anonymous 12th-century poem in which young nuns debate the pressing question of whether knights or clerics make better lovers. This tricky dilemma was a popular topic in both Latin and vernacular poetry of the time, and in our version, as in all others, the clerics win hands down – which may not be unrelated to the fact that the authors of such texts were typically members of the church themselves. Once the women have assembled to hold their council, proceedings begin with a solemn reading:

Intromissis omnibus virginum agminibus,
 Lecta sunt in medium, quasi evangelium,
 Precepta Ovidii, doctoris egregii. (23–5)

Once all the throngs of maidens had entered, there were publicly read out, just like the gospel, the precepts of Ovid, the outstanding teacher.

At an event that centers around questions of erotics, Ovid’s work is treated as a foundational, quasi-religious text and has explicitly taken over the role of the Bible – having become, as it were, the gospel of love.

Earlier in the poem, the speaker in fact points out that throughout the nuns' gathering, the actual gospel is never mentioned (*Sed de evangelio nulla fuit mencio*, 8).

The two Latin poems discussed, with their hyperbolic designation of Ovid as Pope and Evangelist, respectively, belong to a tradition of highly irreverent Latin verse that flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries. Many such texts are found in the *Carmina Burana*, a collection of over 200 poems in both Latin and vernacular languages that dates from the early 13th century and was discovered in 1803 in the Bavarian monastery of Benediktbeuern. *Carmina Burana* 105 continues the theme of Ovid as the teacher of love par excellence, while introducing other Ovidian themes and motifs that reveal the author's deep familiarity with the ancient poet's work.

The setup of this eleven-stanza poem is based on *Pont.* 3.3, where (as we saw in chapter 2) Ovid relates how Cupid appeared to him in a dream at Tomis. In the medieval text, the speaker likewise describes how the god comes to him in his sleep, looking shockingly disheveled:

En, Cupido pharetratus
crinali, torque spoliatus,
manu multa tactus alis,
mesto vultu, numquam talis,
visus est per somnium. (6–10)

There, quivered Cupid appeared to me in my dream, robbed of his hairband and necklace, his wings crushed by many hands, with a sad expression, as he had never been before.

The description is very close to that of Ovid, who also mentions that Cupid lacks his *crinale* ("hairband") and *torquis* ("necklace," *Pont.* 3.3.15), and who compares the sorry state of the god's crushed wings to that of doves whose feathers have been touched by *multae ... manus* ("many hands," *Pont.* 3.3.20). In the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, of course, Cupid's deplorable appearance reflects the sad fate of his poet, and the ensuing conversation revolves around the reason for Ovid's exile and his prospects for a pardon. The medieval Cupid, however, has a different concern, as he proceeds to tell the narrator:

Artes amatorie iam non instruuntur
a Nasone tradite passim pervertuntur;
nam si quis istis utitur, more modernorum
turpiter abutitur hac assuetudine morum.

Naso meis artibus feliciter instructus,
mundique voluptatibus et regulis subductus,
ab errore studuit mundum revocare;
qui sibi notus erat, docuit sapienter amare. (30–7)

The arts of love are no longer taught; handed down by Naso, they are being perverted everywhere. For if someone employs them the way people do today, in so doing, he basely misuses them. Naso – happily instructed in my arts and removed from the pleasures and ways of the world – attempted to call the world back from error. He taught that the man who was known to himself was loving wisely.

Cupid laments that the art of love as taught by Ovid is no longer practiced or, rather, is being perverted by contemporary lovers. As becomes clear in the following stanzas, his main complaint is that the “mysteries of Venus” (38) are being publicly exposed: men boast of their sexual exploits, even to the point of inventing amatory encounters. Love, which should be won through virtue, has become a commodity to be bought and sold. In short: “Such damage has my rule among the people taken” (49).

Cupid’s speech is greatly indebted to Ovid for its subject matter and diction. The last verse of each of its stanzas is not written in the rhythmic meter that is found in the rest of the poem, but is instead a quantitative hexameter that quotes an Ovidian line verbatim or with minor variations. The god’s main argument is based on *Ars* 2.601–40, where Ovid cautions his male students against publicizing their love affairs and inveighs against men who seek to enhance their sexual records with spurious claims.

Despite the text’s highly Ovidian nature, however, it is not entirely clear what role the Roman poet is supposed to be playing. How are we to take the poem’s tone? Is it, as has been suggested, a serious lament about the decline of love in contemporary society? If so, Ovid would be appealed to as a respected authority in amatory matters, and specifically as someone who discourages (as the *praeceptor amoris* indeed does in the *Ars*) exposing love affairs in public. However, are we really supposed to take at face value the claim that Ovid was “removed from the pleasures and ways of the world” and “attempted to call the world back from error”? After all, the maxim that follows – namely, that only the man who knows himself will love wisely – appears in the *Ars* in the context of a bathos-filled speech by Apollo (2.501), who proceeds to apply the famous Delphic dictum “Know Thyself” to the most banal situations (the man who talks well should talk to his girl; the good singer should sing;

the good drinker should drink; etc.). Was the author of *Carmina Burana* 105 – who clearly knew his Ovid very well – not perhaps all too aware of the fact that the *praeceptor amoris* was not exactly a poster child for the kind of love that is “achieved through virtue and acquired through outstanding merits and character” (46–7)? If the poet was counting on his audience to remember the more playful and subversive elements of Ovid’s art of love, then Cupid’s epiphany and lament can be read as a satire of moralizing attitudes to contemporary love rather than their expression. Ultimately, though, in this as in many other medieval texts, it is unclear how seriously the author is taking Ovid as an actual purveyor of valuable insights, or whether the “gospel” the Roman poet preaches is in fact always already taken to be one of ludic perversion.

The Painter’s Bible

A similar interpretive problem confronts us when we turn to Ovid’s reception in European art of the Renaissance and Baroque. As a result of the Humanists’ rediscovery of antiquity and the wide diffusion of ancient texts thanks to the invention of printing, the figurative arts turned increasingly to the depiction of scenes from classical mythology. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* was the single most important source for the mythological scenes popular in European painting and sculpture from the 15th century onward. The poem is thus often referred to as the “painter’s bible,” a designation that not only implies the importance of the text as a source and work of reference, but also hints at the fact that Ovid’s mythological subjects had taken over a role played in medieval art more or less exclusively by biblical motifs. This in turn raises the question of whether Ovidian scenes in art of the period are in the first place highly attractive and decorative instances of pictorial narrative, or whether painters and their patrons found in such mythological subjects a symbolic meaning that assigned to them a function comparable to that previously held by religious art. The answer will no doubt differ from artist to artist and work to work. I here consider three paintings and one sculpture, all fashioned by Italian artists and ranging in date from the 15th century to the 17th.

One of the great artistic challenges presented by the *Metamorphoses* was how to represent the moment of metamorphosis itself. Ovid’s own depictions of changing shapes have often been praised for their visual quality and their affinity to the rhetorical trope of the *ecphrasis*, that is, the description of a work of art. Renaissance and Baroque artists grappled

with how to translate this Ovidian vividness and “freeze” in one image a process far more easily represented in the consecutive medium of narrative. The small painting of Apollo and Daphne by Antonio del Pollaiuolo (1431–98) that serves as the cover image of this book is a naïve but charming early attempt to capture the nymph’s transformation. Pollaiuolo has solved the problem of depicting metamorphosis by showing a Daphne who is half woman, half tree: while her arms are fully developed branches, the rest of her body is as yet unchanged, except that her left foot appears to be already rooted to the ground. Despite the fact that Apollo is shown in motion, the pair have a highly static quality, owing to Daphne’s near-center position and the monumentality of her raised arms. It nearly looks as though Apollo were only faking his run, raising his right leg as though posing in a movie still.

Is Pollaiuolo’s painting just a pretty picture or is Ovid’s tale meant to carry a deeper significance? Independent mythological paintings were still comparatively rare in the 15th century, and it has been suggested that the small wooden panel originally was part of a *cassone* (wedding chest) or another piece of furniture. *Cassoni* were often decorated with mythological love stories deemed to be instructive to the bride and groom. Alternatively, the work may have been painted for the Florentine ruler Lorenzo de’ Medici, a highly educated scholar and poet who identified himself with Apollo and employed the laurel as a personal standard, playing on the equivalence of one version of his name (Lauro) with the Italian word for the tree (*lauro*). Keeping in mind this wordplay, we may also detect in Pollaiuolo’s work a learned allusion to the love poetry of Petrarch (14th C.), who in his vernacular poems casts himself as Apollo and his elusive beloved Laura (note the name) as Daphne.

Moving ahead over 150 years, we may compare the sculpture group of Apollo and Daphne that Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) fashioned between 1622 and 1625 out of a single slab of marble for his patron, Cardinal Scipione Borghese (figure 1). The life-size figures convey a vivid sense of motion, closely evoking Ovid’s description of how the runners’ hair and garments are being blown back by the breeze (*Met.* 1.527–9). As in the poem, Apollo is already so close as to “breathe on the hair spread on her shoulders” (542) when the metamorphosis begins and Daphne’s “soft groin is being surrounded by tender bark” (548), “her hair turns into leaves and her arms into branches” (550), and “her foot, just now so swift, sticks as with clinging roots” (551). It is this one highly dramatic moment that the sculptor has captured; while Pollaiuolo’s painting is, as it were, a stylized emblem of Daphne’s metamorphosis, Bernini’s sculpture brings to life an actual instance in her story.



Figure 1. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo and Daphne* (Galleria Borghese, Rome).

But the work presents a metamorphosis on another level as well. Bernini's Apollo is modeled on the famous Apollo Belvedere, a classical marble sculpture (today in the Vatican Museum) that was rediscovered in the 15th century and celebrated throughout the Renaissance and beyond. The Apollo Belvedere is a nude statue of the god, who is standing upright, with the weight on his right foot, and stretching out his left hand. Bernini's Apollo is but the Apollo Belvedere put into motion, symbolizing the transformation of ancient into modern sculpture, the coming alive of antiquity in the hands of a consummate artist.

A highly sensuous work, the Apollo and Daphne group appears to celebrate the physicality of the body and its uncanny transformation. Is this what attracted Bernini and his contemporaries, or did they look behind the image to find a moral in the myth? The statue's base bears a contemporary inscription, a Latin epigram by Cardinal Maffeo Barberini (later Pope Urban VIII), which states that "the lover who pursues the joys of fugitive beauty will grasp leaves or pluck bitter fruit." Apollo and Daphne are thus reconfigured as protagonists in a morality play, and Bernini's beautiful work is made to convey the very message of beauty's impermanence. However, according to Bernini's contemporary and biographer Filippo Baldinucci, the cardinal was motivated by a practical concern, writing the poem to ensure that "the figure of Daphne – so true and alive – would be less offensive to the eyes of a chaste spectator."¹⁰ Rather than expressing a viable interpretation, then, the epigram appears to be little more than a disingenuous disclaimer, a figleaf to appease those possibly scandalized by the scene's eroticism.

A particularly ingenious handling of the theme of metamorphosis is found in the painting of Jupiter and Io by Antonio Allegri, known as Correggio (1489–1534) (figure 2). One of a series of depictions of the "Loves of Jupiter" and painted around 1530, the image illustrates an episode from *Metamorphoses* 1, the story of the nymph Io, who is raped by Jupiter and subsequently changed into a cow in order to escape detection by the jealous Juno. Interestingly, Correggio does not focus on the – potentially grotesque – transformation of the girl, but gives an original interpretation of an earlier moment in the tale. When Jupiter first made his advances to Io, the nymph fled in horror and was subdued only when "the god hid the lands far and wide by covering them in darkness and stopped her flight and robbed her of her chastity" (*Met.* 1.599–600). Following contemporary commentaries that took this passage to mean that Jupiter had covered *himself* in mist and had intercourse with Io in this disguise, Correggio reinterprets Ovid's sordid story of rape as a mysterious scene of erotic ecstasy. His Io is not running away but sitting expectantly, her head thrown back in quiet rapture, as she is embraced by an arm of cloud and about to be kissed by the god's face that is coming out of the fog.

Retelling a story of the *Metamorphoses* by depicting a metamorphosis that is not in Ovid, Correggio has transformed this "love of Jupiter" from a burlesque narrative of the god's philandering to an expression of his overwhelming erotic attraction. The image and its companion pieces were painted for Federigo Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua, and it is reasonable to assume that this potentate, who had himself a complicated love life,



Figure 2. Antonio Allegri da Correggio, *Jupiter and Io* (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna).

enjoyed both the sophistication and the sensuality of the pictures (the others, likewise highly erotic, feature Ganymede, Leda, and Danaë) while perhaps thinking of himself as playing the role of a modern-day Jupiter. Or is there more to Io than learned eroticism? Much has been made of the animal that can be seen sticking its head into the lower right corner of the painting and drinking from a brook, a creature that has been interpreted variously as a cow or a deer. If it is a cow, the painter would be alluding to Io's impending transformation, thus cleverly packing two different metamorphoses into one and the same image. If, however, it is a deer, the allusion would be not to Ovid, but instead to a biblical text, Psalm 42, which begins, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God." And in that case, we might be inclined to give the painting a religious interpretation: Io's sensual abandonment to her divine lover could be read as an allegory for the soul's spiritual desire for god.

Is this the message of Correggio's Io? The animal head is difficult to identify, and scholars have fallen into two camps, convinced of either its bovine or its deerlike identity and interpreting the picture accordingly. (For what it is worth, the shape of the head looks to me more like that of a cow, though the horns are unusual.) Is it at all possible that the painter has left the question open, depicting a deliberately ambiguous beast to hint at the two possible interpretations of his painting, whose beautiful protagonist might be both an expression of pagan sensuality and a symbol of Christian spiritualism?

Our final painting, Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*, is so original in its composition and enigmatic in its details that no unequivocal interpretation seems possible (figure 3). The work is part of a series of six paintings that Titian (c.1488/90–1576) painted for Philip II of Spain in 1556–9, all of which depict scenes from the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid tells the story of Actaeon in Book 3: while hunting, the Theban prince accidentally comes upon Diana in her bath, thereby committing the offense of seeing the goddess naked. Enraged, she sprinkles him with water, whereupon he is transformed into a stag and subsequently torn apart by his own dogs. Titian's version is unusual in that it does not feature the actual metamorphosis (earlier depictions typically showed Actaeon already partly transformed, often with antlers beginning to sprout from his head). However, the painting hints at the protagonist's soon to be changed shape with the deer skull that is prominently displayed on the column in the middle and the deerskin hung on the branches of the trees to the right.

Titian's composition highlights the theme of vision and voyeurism inherent in the myth. The red curtain drawn aside by the nymph on the



Figure 3. Titian (Tiziano Vecellio), *Diana and Actaeon* (National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh).

left lends a sense of theatricality to the scene: what Actaeon comes upon resembles a carefully staged tableau. The fabric also raises the question of whether the hunter was in fact hiding behind it and watching, which would make him far less of an innocent victim than he is in Ovid. On this interpretation, Actaeon would be revealed to Diana and her nymphs just as much as they are being revealed to him. Indeed, there seems to be a reverse symmetry between the hunter on the left and the goddess on the right: as a textile is removed from him, she attempts to cover herself with a veil.

By affording the viewer the same perspective on the scene that Actaeon himself has, the painting draws its spectators into a drama of gazes. Strangely enough, most of the nymphs are not looking at Actaeon, and some of them (for example, the one who is drying Diana's leg) are

apparently even unaware of the hunter's arrival. Even more strangely, Actaeon's gaze is not directed at Diana, but at the background. It is possible that he is looking at the deer skull, the symbol of his impending metamorphosis, and perhaps undergoing a psychological transformation even before the physical one. It cannot be excluded, though, that his gaze is locking with that of the young nymph who peeps out from behind the pillar and who is the only character who looks *out of* the picture, toward Actaeon and toward the viewer. It might appear as though this nymph and Actaeon are falling in love at first sight – an unorthodox motif, to be sure, and one that has no place in the myth.

There are many other mysterious elements to the painting. What, for instance, is the significance of the headstone with the lion's head relief on the arch to the left, which forms a triangle with Actaeon's head and the deer skull? What are we supposed to make of the reaction of Diana, who, rather than angrily sprinkling Actaeon with water, shields herself with her veil – though not so much from the young man as apparently from the sight of the deer skull? And what is the function of the black attendant who assists Diana and whose dark skin makes a striking contrast with the light body of the goddess (x-rays show that Titian first painted a white woman before changing her into an African)?

Like Correggio before and Bernini after, Titian took the opportunity Ovid's myth afforded him to represent the beauty of the naked female form. Even more so than the other artists, he complicated his depiction, introducing riddles and ambiguities and raising questions about the process of viewing, the nature of erotic attraction, and the mysteries of death and transformation. While Ovid's story in a way serves only as a point of departure for Titian, the unstable world the painter creates is still unmistakably Ovidian.

At the End of the World

As an authority on both love and myth, Ovid exerted crucial influence on European literature and art and continues to do so. To mention just two recent examples: in Stanley Kubrick's 1999 movie *Eyes Wide Shut*, an Ovid-quoting would-be seducer employs a strategy straight out of the *Ars amatoria*, and Mary Zimmerman's haunting stage adaptation of the *Metamorphoses*, set in and around a pool of water, was a Broadway hit in 2002. However, the aspect of Ovid that appears to have most fascinated people in recent decades is the mystery of the poet's exile. As part of the surge of interest in all things Ovidian, a mini-genre of narrative has

sprung up that I call the “Ovid novel” and that treats, in one way or another, the figure of the author and his banishment to Tomis. Ovid novels have appeared in a number of different languages; in what follows, I concentrate on texts that were written in or have been translated into English.

There are, roughly speaking, two ways of telling a story about Ovid’s exile. The first is to participate in the millennia-old game of speculation about the reasons for the poet’s relegation and to write a novel that explains (finally!) why it really happened. The second is to focus instead on the experience of exile itself, trying to recreate Tomis, both as an actual place and as a new way of life to which Ovid has to adapt.

As for the first approach, the obvious way to tackle the mystery of Ovid’s banishment is via the genre of the detective story. In David Wishart’s highly entertaining *Ovid* (1995), the young good-for-nothing aristocrat Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus (grandson of Ovid’s erstwhile patron of the same name) is approached by his client, Ovid’s stepdaughter Perilla, who asks him to assist her in bringing back to Rome the ashes of her stepfather, who has recently died in Tomis. When the imperial household denies Messalla’s request and it becomes clear that more than one secret is being closely guarded by more than one person, Messalla turns detective and succeeds in uncovering not only the reason for the poet’s dispatch to Tomis, but also a major plot against Augustus.

Wishart’s novel, which betrays a good grasp of Roman life and history, is a *noir* story in the mold of Raymond Chandler: the hard-boiled and hard-drinking private eye Messalla has his counterpart in the fast-talking dame Perilla, for whom he falls hard, enjoying some steamy encounters in the process (never mind that she is married to a Roman senator). Told from the detective’s first-person perspective, the book abounds in funny quips and dry assessments of life in the urban jungle that is Rome (sample sentence: “Perilla’s stepfather had had the morals and self-restraint of a priapic rabbit,” 4). As is typical in this genre, the solution to the mystery is hardly very satisfying (spoiler alert: it involves Varus, the general of the infamous Roman defeat at Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE), but we enjoy coming along for the ride.

Rather than unraveling the enigma of Ovid’s exile after the fact, Jane Alison in *The Love-Artist* (2001) describes the events that lead up to the disaster, offering a wholly original scenario in which the fatal *carmen* is not the *Ars amatoria*, but the *Medea*. From an earlier journey to the Black Sea, Ovid has brought back as his lover the beautiful and mysterious Xenia, a woman with magic and prophetic abilities. Their relationship is based on a form of mutual exploitation, with each partner taking

advantage of the other in a bid for immortality: Ovid uses Xenia as poetic inspiration, while she hopes to live on as a figure in his poetry. When Xenia finds out, however, that the role in which the poet has cast her is the invidious one of Medea and that he has contrived for the two of them to “live” the tragedy’s plot as he is writing it, her anger knows no bounds and she hastens to bring the story to its tragic conclusion.

Alternating between scenes told from Ovid’s perspective and others narrated from the point of view of Xenia, the novel builds up its story in such a way that it becomes only gradually clear what is happening and where things are going. I imagine that readers unfamiliar with Ovid might find it hard to follow the plot and the motivations behind it; those with the requisite knowledge, however, will appreciate how the author has cleverly wedged her tale into the known parameters of the poet’s life and career. Far more than a bid at solving the riddle of Ovid’s exile, Alison’s lyrical narrative reflects on the relationship between the sexes, the troubling intersection of life and art, and the human desire to transcend the boundaries of time and space, and so to live on forever – as Xenia knows Ovid will (though she tortures him by keeping this knowledge to herself).

Unlike Wishart and Alison, Josef Skvorecky in *An Inexplicable Story* (2002; in Czech 2002) does not tell an unmediated tale with flesh-and-blood Romans as its protagonists but, in good postmodern fashion, provides only what are literally but fragments of evidence concerning Ovid’s fate. The novel consists of the scholarly edition (complete with notes and commentary) of scraps of a Roman manuscript that have been discovered during an excavation in Honduras (!) and that contain autobiographical notes of one Questus Firmus Siculus, Ovid’s illegitimate son with Proculeia, otherwise known as Corinna. The bits and pieces of text reveal a number of remarkable facts, including that Ovid (exiled because of an affair with none other than Augustus’ wife Livia) did not remain in Tomis but traveled on to Vindobona (where he put on a farcical play about the emperor) and may ultimately have ended up in Britain (at the court of King Cymbeline?). Even more sensational is the claim that Questus himself constructed a steamboat and journeyed to South America, a trip that ultimately led to his demise on a desert island.

As the title blatantly advertises, Skvorecky’s story is truly inexplicable and (unlike other examples of the “found manuscript” genre) makes no attempt at plausibility whatsoever. Its absurdity is fully exposed in the novel’s various appendices, which contain letters and other documents purportedly supplied by various correspondents in response to the first edition of Questus’ manuscript. As these highly observant readers point

out, the “ancient” text abounds in anachronistic allusions to such modern authors as Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and Georges Feydeau. With his deconstruction of the notion of archaeological evidence and demonstration of the inherent intertextuality of all literature, Skvorecky, far from bringing to light the truth about Ovid’s exile, has playfully buried it further, relegating it to the realm of mythmaking and storytelling, where it will continue to inspire more or less incredible stories.

Novels of the second type, that is, ones that focus on Ovid’s exile itself, tend to be considerably less playful, typically treating themes of identity and alienation. The first in this genre is *God Was Born in Exile* (1961; in French 1960) by the Romanian scholar and writer Vintila Horia. This engagingly written work takes the form of Ovid’s diary at Tomis, charting the poet’s emotional development as he comes to feel increasingly at home among the Dacians, to the extent that his appeals for a pardon end up being mere pretense (the fact that Horia himself was an exile *from* Romania adds a special poignancy to the novel, as the place that Ovid abhorred for being barbarian is reconfigured as a kind of ideal country). Ovid’s “going native” has a spiritual component: he is fascinated by the monotheism of the Dacians and their god Zamolxis, feeling ever more keenly that the world is ripe for a new age and thus a new form of religion.

With Ovid’s anticipation of a “new metamorphosis of man” (85), the novel turns into a blatant advertisement of Christianity, which is introduced into the narrative in numerous ways, including a symbolic dream that Ovid has about a fish, as well as the poet’s encounter with an itinerant Greek doctor, who happened to be present at the birth of Jesus. As Ovid comes to realize, the new god is born in exile, while the poet’s own exile has turned into a locus of spiritual rebirth. At the end of the book, Ovid himself is close to death, but, we are to understand, a new era has begun.

Different in style and outlook, *An Imaginary Life* (1978) by the Australian writer David Malouf shares with Horia’s novel the basic idea that Ovid’s exile is a journey of self-discovery. Rather than finding (proto-)Christianity, however, Malouf’s protagonist becomes more and more absorbed in a quest for primitive nature, undergoing a metamorphosis in which he gradually sheds the superficial accoutrements of culture and becomes part of a more immediate reality. In the forbidding climate and alien society of the Black Sea (unlike Horia, who presents a – probably more realistic – Mediterranean vacation land, Malouf further exaggerates Ovid’s stark depiction of the region), the poet comes to rethink his notions of civilization and language. He adopts a feral child,

but as he attempts to teach the boy to speak and live a human life, he gets drawn ever more into his pupil's savage and beautiful world. The novel ends with poet and child on a journey away from Tomis, into the wilderness that Ovid believes will hold further revelations.

As Malouf himself acknowledges in his "Afterword," Ovid – the proponent of culture par excellence – might appear to be an unlikely candidate for a transcending journey into the depths of nature. However, this is the novelist's very point: "to make this glib fabulist of 'the changes' live out in reality what had been, in his previous existence, merely the occasion for dazzling literary display" (154). Having previously lived life in the house of mirrors that is language, Ovid in exile comes to find a deeper and more satisfying authenticity, ending his story with the simple words, "I am there" (152).

In the most ambitious and famous of Ovid novels, Christoph Ransmayr's *The Last World* (1990; in German 1988), Ovid is very much not "there," but has instead disappeared from Tomis. In an attempt to find the poet and perhaps discover his famous *Metamorphoses* (ostentatiously burned before Ovid left Rome but rumored to survive), his friend Cotta arrives from Rome and begins his search in the confusing world of Tomis. Unlike Wishart, Alison, Horia, and Malouf, who all in a way are writing historical novels, attempting to recreate the Rome and Black Sea region of Ovid's time, Ransmayr has devised a fictional world that is not identical to any particular area or era but mixes elements of modernity (microphones, film projectors) with those of a preindustrial time. Even more disorienting – not just to the reader, but to Cotta as well – is the fact that the inhabitants of Tomis all bear names taken from the *Metamorphoses* and seem to live the stories of Ovid's poem. Thus, to take a single example, Battus, the epileptic son of Fama, owner of the local grocery store, ultimately turns to stone, just as his namesake does in Ovid's second book.

Cotta never finds Ovid, but he makes an attempt to piece together the *Metamorphoses*, both from inscriptions on scraps of fabric and other materials that the poet has left behind and from stories of transformation that Ovid used to tell the Tomitans. He finally comes to realize that Tomis *is* the *Metamorphoses*, that Ovid's poem has been transformed into reality. Since this poem is inscribed in or, rather, coextensive with the physical world – its animals, plants, and stones – there is no longer a need for a written version or, in fact, a poet: "Reality, once discovered, no longer needed recording" (219).

Cotta's quest to make sense of the *Metamorphoses* in the absence of Ovid himself (shades of the postmodern notion of the "death of the

author”) mirrors the situation of every reader who attempts to interpret the Roman poet’s texts today. As we have seen in the course of this book, Ovid the man is as elusive to us as Ransmayr’s missing character is to his faithful friend. However, like Cotta, who by putting together the literal and figurative fragments of Ovid’s poem is ultimately able to “read” the *Metamorphoses* in the world around him, we are able to generate our own readings of the poet’s works – just as readers have been doing for the past two millennia.

Further Reading

The following suggestions are intended for readers who wish to study Ovid's work in greater depth and follow up on the topics discussed in this book. It is by no means a comprehensive bibliography, but simply a list of recommended titles. The selection is largely restricted to works in English, but I have included a few items in foreign languages that either present particularly important treatments of specific issues or have especially influenced one or another of my arguments. It should go without saying that any serious scholarly engagement with Ovid would need to take account of a full range of critical works, including in languages other than English.

General Works on Ovid

A number of monographs treat Ovid's life and work as a whole. Of older titles, L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge, 1955) is still well worth reading; the work was instrumental in ushering in the renaissance of Ovidian studies in the second half of the 20th century (note the programmatic title). H. Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds* (Berkeley, 1945), with its central thesis of an Ovid who is standing on the threshold between antiquity and Christianity, is more idiosyncratic. More contemporary approaches are found in S. Mack, *Ovid* (New Haven, 1988) and N. Holzberg, *Ovid: The Poet and His Work* (Ithaca, 2002; in German 1997). P. R. Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge, 2002) is a postmodern/psychoanalytical exploration of themes of presence and absence throughout Ovid's work, while R.

Armstrong, *Ovid and His Love Poetry* (London, 2005) and G. Liveley, *Ovid: Love Songs* (London, 2005) present highly readable introductions to the poet's amatory works.

The past decade has seen the publication of three "companions" to Ovid's oeuvre, which contain short discussions by various authors of the poet's works, themes, context, and reception: *Brill's Companion to Ovid* (ed. B. W. Boyd; Leiden, 2002), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (ed. P. Hardie; Cambridge, 2002), and Blackwell's *A Companion to Ovid* (ed. P. E. Knox; Malden, MA, 2009). All three volumes present excellent starting points for Ovidian studies and contain up-to-date bibliographies. Somewhat differently, P. E. Knox (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Ovid* (Oxford, 2006) is a collection of twenty reprinted classic articles on different aspects of the poet and his work. (In the following, I refer to the four volumes just mentioned as *Brill Companion*, *Cambridge Companion*, *Blackwell Companion*, and *Oxford Readings*.)

To gain a sense of Ovid's literary context and place within Latin literature, see G. B. Conte, *Latin Literature: A History* (Baltimore, 1994).

Individual Works

Amores

For the Latin text, see the *Oxford Classical Text* of all amatory works by E. J. Kenney (2nd edn., Oxford, 1994). There is an ongoing commentary by J. C. McKeown, of which three volumes have been published so far (text and prolegomena, commentary on Book 1, and commentary on Book 2; Liverpool and Leeds, 1987–98); see also the commentaries of J. Barsby on Book 1 (London, 1993) and J. Booth on Book 2 (Warminster, 1991).

There are enjoyable translations of the *Amores* by G. Lee (London, 1968), P. Green (part of his *Ovid: The Erotic Poems*, Harmondsworth, 1982), and A. D. Melville (part of his *Ovid: The Love Poems*, Oxford, 1990).

J. T. Davis, *Fictus Adulter: Poet as Actor in the Amores* (Amsterdam, 1989) provides a spirited introduction to the collection, with a special focus on Ovid's persona. B. W. Boyd, *Ovid's Literary Loves: Influence and Innovation in the Amores* (Ann Arbor, 1997) concentrates in particular on the poet's transformation of the elegiac genre. M. Wyke, "Reading Female Flesh: *Amores* 3.1" (in A. Cameron (ed.), *History as*

Text (London, 1989), pp. 111–43; repr. in Wyke, *The Roman Mistress* (Oxford, 2002) and in *Oxford Readings*, pp. 169–204) is an influential article that uses *Am.* 3.1 as a starting point for a general discussion of constructions of the elegiac *puella*.

Heroides

The Latin text of all the *Heroides* is most easily accessed in the Loeb edition by G. Showerman, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA, 1977). There is an edition with commentary of a selection of single letters by P. E. Knox (Cambridge, 1995) and one of the double letters by E. J. Kenney (Cambridge, 1996). Note also the commentaries on *Her.* 11, 13, and 14 by J. Reeson (Leiden, 2001) and *Her.* 16 and 17 by A. Michalopoulos (Cambridge, 2006).

The letters have been translated by H. Isbell (Harmondsworth, 1990) and D. Hine (New Haven, 1991).

P. E. Knox, “The *Heroides*: Elegiac Voices” (*Brill Companion*, pp. 117–39) is a helpful general introduction to the *Heroides*, while H. Jacobson, *Ovid’s Heroides* (Princeton, 1974) presents close readings of all individual single letters. For recent monographs on the *Heroides* with a feminist perspective, see below under “Women.”

Medicamina Faciei Femineae, Ars Amatoria, and Remedia Amoris

For the Latin text, see the *Oxford Classical Text* of all amatory works by E. J. Kenney (2nd edn., Oxford, 1994). There are commentaries on *Ars* 1 by A. S. Hollis (Oxford, 1977), *Ars* 3 by R. Gibson (Cambridge, 2003), and the *Remedia* by A. A. R. Henderson (Edinburgh, 1979).

The translation of P. Green in his *Ovid: The Erotic Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1982) is very entertaining and true to the spirit of the original; see also A. D. Melville’s version in his *Ovid: The Love Poems* (Oxford, 1990).

M. Myerowitz, *Ovid’s Games of Love* (Detroit, 1985) provides an introduction to the *Ars* with a focus on Ovid’s idea of love, while K. Volk, *The Poetics of Latin Didactic: Lucretius, Vergil, Ovid, Manilius* (Oxford, 2002), chapter 5, discusses the work’s didactic aspects. R. Gibson, S. Green, and A. Sharrock (eds.), *The Art of Love: Bimillennial Essays on Ovid’s Ars amatoria and Remedia Amoris* (Oxford, 2006) is a recent collection of articles by an international group of scholars on various aspects of Ovid’s erotodidactic poems.

Metamorphoses

The authoritative Latin text of the *Metamorphoses* is now the *Oxford Classical Text* of R. J. Tarrant (Oxford, 2004). There are a number of commentaries on individual (sets of) books. Books 1–5: W. S. Anderson (Norman, OK, 1997); Books 1–4: D. E. Hill (Warminster, 1985); Books 5–8: D. E. Hill (Warminster, 1992); Books 6–10: W. S. Anderson (Norman, OK, 1972); Book 8: A. S. Hollis (Oxford, 1970); Books 9–12: D. E. Hill (Warminster, 1999); Book 11: G. M. H. Murphy (Bristol, 1972); Books 13–15: D. E. Hill (Warminster, 2000); Book 13: N. Hopkinson (Cambridge, 2000); Book 14: K. S. Myers (Cambridge, 2009). An ongoing Italian commentary prepared by an international team under the direction of A. Barchiesi will ultimately be translated into English and published by Cambridge University Press (so far, three volumes have appeared in Italy, on Books 1–2, 3–4, and 5–6).

There are numerous translations of the *Metamorphoses*, including the recent versions by A. D. Melville (Oxford, 1986), A. Mandelbaum (New York, 1993), D. R. Slavitt (Baltimore, 1994), and D. A. Raeburn (London, 2004). Note also T. Hughes's selection *Tales from Ovid* (London, 1997), as well as the modern retellings in M. Hofmann and J. Lasdun (eds.), *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses* (London, 1994).

For a general short introduction to the *Metamorphoses*, see E. Fantham, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Oxford, 2004); more detail is found in G. K. Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Berkeley, 1975). There have been many fine monographs on Ovid's longest poem. J. B. Solodow, *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Chapel Hill, 1988) focuses especially on the role of the narrator; K. S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology in the Metamorphoses* (Ann Arbor, 1994) considers the theme of aetiology; G. Tissol, *The Face of Nature: Wit, Narrative, and Cosmic Origins in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Princeton, 1997) offers a close examination of Ovid's verbal wit; and S. M. Wheeler, *A Discourse of Wonders: Audience and Performance in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Philadelphia, 1999) provides a narratological reading. P. R. Hardie, A. Barchiesi, and S. Hinds (eds.), *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on the Metamorphoses and Its Reception* (Cambridge, 1999 = Cambridge Philological Society Supplement 23) is a recent collection of individual essays.

For the possible sources of the *Metamorphoses*, see chapter 10 of A. Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* (New York, 2004); generally on metamorphosis in Greek myth and literature, see P. M. C.

Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myth* (Oxford, 1990) and R. Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis* (Oxford, 2009). On the theme of metamorphosis and its reception in European literature and art, see L. Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven, 1986).

Fasti

For the Latin text of the *Fasti*, see the Teubner edition of E. H. Alton, D. E. W. Wormell, and E. Courtney (Leipzig, 1978). There are a commentaries on Book 1 (S. J. Green; Leiden, 2004), Book 4 (E. Fantham; Cambridge, 1998), and Book 6 (R. J. Littlewood; Oxford, 2006).

The translation of A. J. Boyle and R. D. Woodard (Harmondsworth, 2000) comes with helpful notes; see also the version by B. R. Nagle (Bloomington, IN, 1995).

J. F. Miller, *Ovid's Elegiac Festivals: Studies in the Fasti* (Frankfurt, 1991) provides a good introduction to the poem, with a special focus on questions of genre; see also the same author's article "The *Fasti*: Style, Structure, and Time" (*Brill Companion*, pp. 167–96). C. E. Newlands, *Playing with Time: Ovid and the Fasti* (Ithaca, 1995) is a classic "pessimistic" reading. Volume 25.1 of the journal *Arethusa* (1992) is an important collection of papers on the *Fasti* by a group of renowned scholars.

Exile Poetry

For the Latin text of the *Tristia*, see the Teubner edition of J. B. Hall (Stuttgart, 1995); note also the edition with commentary (in German) by G. Luck (2 vols., Heidelberg, 1967–77). The *Epistulae ex Ponto* have been edited for Teubner by J. A. Richmond (Leipzig, 1990), and there are commentaries on Book 1 by J. F. Gaertner (Oxford, 2005) and poems 1–7 and 16 of Book 4 by M. Helzle (Hildesheim, 1989).

The excellent translation of the *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* by P. Green (2nd edn., Berkeley, 2005) features an extensive introduction and commentary. Note also the version of the exile poems by D. R. Slavitt (Baltimore, 1990) – who, unlike Green, also provides a lively rendition of the *Ibis* – as well as the translation of the *Tristia* by A. D. Melville (Oxford, 1992).

For a general introduction to the exile poetry, see G. D. Williams, "Ovid's Exilic Poetry: Worlds Apart" (*Brill Companion*, pp. 337–81); note also the same author's *Banished Voices: Readings in Ovid's Exile Poetry* (Cambridge, 1994) and *The Curse of Exile: A Study of Ovid's Ibis*

(Cambridge, 1996 = Cambridge Philological Society Supplement 19). B. R. Nagle, *The Poetics of Exile: Program and Polemic in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto of Ovid* (Brussels, 1980) is an important discussion of Ovid's exilic poetics and creative reuse of elegiac topoi. J.-M. Claassen has published numerous titles on the exile poems; see now most conveniently her collection *Ovid Revisited: The Poet in Exile* (London, 2008). Many of the observations found in later scholarship on the exile poetry are already present in H. Rahn's article "Ovids elegische Epistel" (*Antike & Abendland* 7 (1958): 105–20).

The text of the doubtful *Halieutica*, *Nux*, and *Consolatio ad Liviam* as well as fragments of Ovid's lost works can be found in the edition of F. W. Lenz (2nd edn., Turin, 1952); for the fragments, see also E. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 308–14. The spurious and lost works are discussed in J. Richmond, "Doubtful Works Ascribed to Ovid" (*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2.31.4 (1981): 2744–83) and P. E. Knox, "Lost and Spurious Works" (*Blackwell Companion*, pp. 207–16).

Life

For a discussion of what we know about Ovid's life, see P. White, "Ovid and the Augustan Milieu" (*Brill Companion*, pp. 1–25). The following articles discuss various aspects of what I have called the "story of Ovid," that is, the way in which Ovid over the course of his oeuvre shapes a narrative of his own career as a poet: N. Holzberg, "Playing with His Life: Ovid's 'Autobiographical' References" (*Lampas* 30 (1997): 4–19; repr. in *Oxford Readings*, pp. 51–68), I. Gildenhard and A. Zissos, "Inspirational Fictions: Autobiography and Generic Reflexivity in Ovid's Proems" (*Greece & Rome* 47 (2000): 67–79), and R. Tarrant, "Ovid and Ancient Literary History" (*Cambridge Companion*, pp. 13–33). See further K. Volk, "Ille ego: (Mis)Reading Ovid's Elegiac Persona" (*Antike & Abendland* 51 (2005): 83–96), generally on Ovid's persona, and E. J. Kenney, "Ovidius Prooemians" (*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 22 (1976): 46–53; repr. in *Oxford Readings*, pp. 265–73), on the proem to the *Metamorphoses*.

The most detailed discussion of the possible reasons for Ovid's exile is J. C. Thibault, *The Mystery of Ovid's Exile* (Berkeley, 1964), which surveys earlier theories. More recent suggestions are found in P. Green, "Carmen et Error: πρόφασις and αἰτία in the Matter of Ovid's Exile"

(*Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982): 202–20) and G. P. Goold, “The Cause of Ovid’s Exile” (*Illinois Classical Studies* 8 (1983): 94–107). For the idea that Ovid was not actually banished but invented his exile as a literary conceit, see A. D. Fitton Brown, “The Unreality of Ovid’s Tomitan Exile” (*Liverpool Classical Monthly* 10 (1985): 18–22), A. W. J. Holleman, “Ovid’s Exile” (*Liverpool Classical Monthly* 10 (1985): 48), and S. Bingham, “Life on an Island: A Brief Study of Places of Exile in the First Century AD” (*Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 11 (2003): 376–400).

Elegy

There is no general introduction to the genre of Roman love elegy in English; in German, see N. Holzberg, *Die römische Liebeselegie: Eine Einführung* (2nd edn., Darmstadt, 2001). Fine discussions of individual Latin love poets, including the elegists, are found in R. O. A. M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets from Catullus to Horace* (Oxford, 1980); D. F. Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge, 1993) is a set of elegant poststructuralist essays. The papyrus with our longest surviving fragment of the first elegist Gallus was published in R. D. Anderson, P. J. Parsons, and R. G. M. Nisbet, “Elegiacs by Gallus from Qaşr Ibrîm” (*Journal of Roman Studies* 69 (1979): 125–55).

For Ovid’s transformation of the elegiac genre, see S. J. Harrison, “Ovid and Genre: Evolutions of an Elegist” (*Cambridge Companion*, pp. 79–94) and J. Farrell, “Ovid’s Generic Transformation” (*Blackwell Companion*, pp. 370–80). On the role of elegy in the *Fasti*, see S. Hinds, “*Arma* in Ovid’s *Fasti*. Part 1: Genre and Mannerism” and “*Arma* in Ovid’s *Fasti*. Part 2: Genre, Romulean Rome and Augustan Ideology” (*Arethusa* 25 (1992): 81–112 and 113–53). The classic discussion of the programmatic and crypto-elegiac nature of the Apollo and Daphne episode is W. S. M. Nicoll, “Cupid, Apollo, and Daphne (Ovid, *Met.* 1.452ff.)” (*Classical Quarterly* 30 (1980): 174–82); see also P. E. Knox, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry* (Cambridge, 1986 = Cambridge Philological Society Supplement 11). Ovid’s deconstruction of elegy is neatly demonstrated in G. B. Conte’s essay “Love without Elegy: The *Remedia amoris* and the Logic of a Genre” in the author’s *Genres and Readers: Lucretius, Love Elegy, Pliny’s Encyclopedia* (Baltimore, 1994; in Italian 1991), pp. 35–65; see also the discussion in Volk, *Poetics of Latin Didactic*, pp. 159–73.

Myth

Generally on Ovid's use of myth, see the chapter by F. Graf, "Myth in Ovid" (*Cambridge Companion*, pp. 108–21), as well as A. J. Boyle, "Ovid and Greek Myth" (in R. D. Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 355–81). G. B. Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poets* (Ithaca, 1986; in Italian 1974 and 1980) and S. Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge, 1998) are two influential books on intertextuality in Latin poetry. S. Casali, "Ovidian Intertextuality" (*Blackwell Companion*, pp. 341–54) provides a well-informed and well-presented overview of (studies of) intertextuality specifically in Ovid; see also many of the papers in A. Barchiesi, *Speaking Volumes: Narrative and Intertext in Ovid and Other Latin Poets* (London, 2001). S. Hinds's *The Metamorphosis of Persephone: Ovid and the Self-conscious Muse* (Cambridge, 1987) is a detailed discussion of intertextuality and genre in the Persephone episodes of both the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. There have been numerous publications on Ovid's imitation of and engagement with Vergil; I recommend especially two articles by S. Casali, "Correcting Aeneas's Voyage: Ovid's Commentary on *Aeneid* 3" (*Transactions of the American Philological Association* 137 (2007): 181–210) and "Other Voices in Ovid's *Aeneid*" (*Oxford Readings*, pp. 144–65; in Italian 1995).

Wheeler, *Discourse of Wonders* is now the standard discussion of narrative and narratology in the *Metamorphoses*; for an excellent introduction to the issues, see G. Rosati, "Narrative Techniques and Narrative Structures in the *Metamorphoses*" (*Brill Companion*, pp. 271–304). Nestor's untrustworthy tale of the Lapiths and Centaurs in *Metamorphoses* 12 is the topic of M. W. Musgrove, "Nestor's Centauromachy and the Deceptive Voice of Poetic Memory (Ovid *Met.* 12.181–535)" (*Classical Philology* 93 (1998): 223–31).

On anachronisms and other Ovidian plays with time in the *Metamorphoses* and elsewhere, see A. M. Keith, *The Play of Fictions: Studies in Ovid's Metamorphoses Book 2* (Ann Arbor, 1992), as well as three articles in the volume *Ovidian Transformations*: D. C. Feeney, "*Mea tempora*: Patterning of Time in the *Metamorphoses*" (pp. 13–30), A. Zissos and I. Gildenhard, "Problems of Time in *Metamorphoses* 2" (pp. 31–47), and S. Hinds, "After Exile: Time and Teleology from *Metamorphoses* to *Ibis*" (pp. 122–49); compare also Hinds's "Dislocations of Ovidian Time" (in J. P. Schwindt (ed.), *La Représentation du temps*

dans la poésie augustéenne/Zur Poetik der Zeit in augusteischer Dichtung (Heidelberg, 2005), pp. 203–30).

A. Barchiesi, “Discordant Muses” (*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 37 (1991): 1–21) discusses, among other things, how the *Fasti* functions as a sequel to the *Metamorphoses*. The way in which each letter of the *Heroides* inserts itself into an exact moment of the myth in question was famously pointed out by D. F. Kennedy, “The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid’s *Heroides*” (*Classical Quarterly* 34 (1984): 413–22; repr. in *Oxford Readings*, pp. 69–85), with special reference to *Heroides* 1. See K. Volk, “*Cum carmine crescit et annus*: Ovid’s *Fasti* and the Poetics of Simultaneity” (*Transactions of the American Philological Association* 127 (1997): 287–313) on “mimetic simultaneity” in the *Fasti*, as well as *Poetics of Latin Didactic*, pp. 173–88, for the use of this device in the *Ars amatoria*. Narrative readings of many of Ovid’s non-narrative works can be found in Holzberg, *Ovid*; see also E. Tola, “Chronological Segmentation in Ovid’s *Tristia*: The Implicit Narrative of Elegy” (in G. Liveley and P. Salzman-Mitchell (eds.), *Latin Elegy and Narratology: Fragments of Story* (Columbus, OH, 2008), pp. 51–67) on the “plot” of the *Tristia*.

Art

On Ovid’s rhetorical training and rhetoricity, see T. F. Higham, “Ovid and Rhetoric” (in N. I. Herescu (ed.), *Ovidiana: Recherches sur Ovide* (Paris, 1958), pp. 32–48). The multiple explanations found in the *Fasti* are discussed by J. F. Miller, “The *Fasti* and Hellenistic Didactic: Ovid’s Variant Aetiologies” (*Arethusa* 25 (1992): 11–31).

Two important Italian books from the 1980s treat the centrality of *ars* in Ovid’s work: G. Rosati, *Narciso e Pigmalione: Illusione e spettacolo nelle Metamorfosi di Ovidio* (Florence, 1983) examines Ovid’s poetics in the *Metamorphoses*, demonstrating that art is consistently presented as superior to nature, and M. Labate, *L’arte di farsi amare: Modelli culturali e progetto didascalico nell’elegia ovidiana* (Pisa, 1984) explores the poet’s cultural project in the *Ars amatoria*, with special attention to its espousal of contemporary urbanity and *cultus*. Further stimulating observations on the role of art in both poems can be found in J. B. Solodow, “Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*: The Lover as Cultural Ideal” (*Wiener Studien* 11 (1977): 106–27) and the same author’s *World of Ovid’s Metamorphoses*.

There have been many publications on the topic of artists in the *Metamorphoses*. See especially E. W. Leach, “Ekphrasis and the Theme

of Artistic Failure in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" (*Ramus* 3 (1974): 102–42), D. Lateiner, "Mythic and Non-mythic Artists in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" (*Ramus* 13 (1984): 1–30), W. S. Anderson, "The Artist's Limits in Ovid: Orpheus, Pygmalion, and Daedalus" (*Syllecta Classica* 1 (1989): 1–11), B. Harries, "The Spinner and the Poet: Arachne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" (*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 36 (1990): 64–82), P. J. Johnson, *Ovid before Exile: Art and Punishment in the Metamorphoses* (Madison, WI, 2008), and B. Pavlock, *The Image of the Poet in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Madison, WI, 2009). For a feminist reading of the Pygmalion story, see A. R. Sharrock, "Womanufacture" (*Journal of Roman Studies* 81 (1991): 36–49).

Women

Generally on the elegiac *puella*, see M. Wyke, *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations* (Oxford, 2002) and S. L. James, *Learned Girls and Male Persuasion: Gender and Reading in Roman Love Elegy* (Berkeley, 2003). Recent examinations of the role of women in the *Heroides* (with quite different conclusions) are found in S. H. Lindheim, *Mail and Female: Epistolary Narrative and Desire in Ovid's Heroides* (Madison, WI, 2003), E. Spentzou, *Readers and Writers in Ovid's Heroides: Transgressions of Genre and Gender* (Oxford, 2003), and L. Fulkerson, *The Ovidian Heroine as Author: Reading, Writing, and Community in the Heroides* (Cambridge, 2005).

L. C. Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the *Metamorphoses*" (*Arethusa* 11 (1978): 213–41) and A. Richlin, "Reading Ovid's Rapes" (in Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (New York, 1992), pp. 158–79) attempt to come to terms with the theme of rape in Ovid's work. Specifically on the story of Philomela in *Metamorphoses* 6, see C. Segal, "Philomela's Web and the Pleasures of the Text: Reader and Violence in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid" (in I. J. F. de Jong and J. P. Sullivan (eds.), *Modern Critical Theory and Classical Literature* (Leiden, 1994), pp. 257–80).

On sexuality and gender roles in ancient Rome, see the Introduction to C. A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (2nd edn., New York, 2010), as well as the graphic and amusing discussion of H. N. Parker, "The Teratogenic Grid" (in J. P. Hallett and M. B. Skinner (eds.), *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 47–65). The classic discussion of gender as performance is J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2nd edn., New

York, 1999). The gender-bending story of Iphis in *Metamorphoses* 9 is discussed by S. M. Wheeler, "Changing Names: The Miracle of Iphis in Ovid *Metamorphoses* 9" (*Phoenix* 51 (1997): 190–202), D. T. Pintabone, "Ovid's Iphis and Ianthe: When Girls Won't Be Girls" (in N. S. Rabinowitz and L. Auanger (eds.), *Among Women: From the Homosocial to the Homoerotic in the Ancient World* (Austin, TX, 2002), pp. 256–85), S. Raval, "Cross-dressing and 'Gender Trouble' in the Ovidian Corpus" (*Helios* 29 (2002): 149–72), and K. Ormand, "Impossible Lesbians in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*" (in R. Ancona and E. Greene (eds.), *Gendered Dynamics in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore, 2005), pp. 79–110). On the performance of gender in the *Metamorphoses*, compare also two articles by S. H. Lindheim, "I Am Dressed, Therefore I Am? Vertumnus in Propertius 4.2 and *Metamorphoses* 14.622–771" (*Ramus* 27 (1998): 27–38) and "Pomona's *pomarium*: The 'Mapping Impulse' in *Metamorphoses* 14 (and 9)" (*Transactions of the American Philological Association* 140 (2010): 163–94).

Rome

On literary constructions of the city of Rome, see C. Edwards, *Writing Rome: Textual Approaches to the City* (Cambridge, 1996). Aspects of Augustan culture are discussed by P. Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (Ann Arbor, 1988; in German 1987), on the visual arts, and D. Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley, 2007), chapter 6, on the emperor's control of time; see also, for a more comprehensive treatment, K. Galinsky, *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction* (Princeton, 1996). Generally on Ovid's relationship to Augustan Rome, see T. Habinek, "Ovid and Empire" (*Cambridge Companion*, pp. 46–61) and A. J. Boyle, *Ovid and the Monuments: A Poet's Rome* (Victoria, 2003), the latter with useful discussion of all Augustan buildings treated by Ovid. On urbanism in the *Ars amatoria*, see Labate, *L'arte di farsi amare* and compare K. Volk, "Ars Amatoria Romana: Ovid on Love as a Cultural Construct" (in Gibson, Green, and Sharrock, *The Art of Love*, pp. 235–51) on how Ovid presents his amatory teaching as uniquely Roman. M. Beard's article "A Complex of Times: No More Sheep on Romulus' Birthday" (*Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 33 (1987): 1–16) is an insightful discussion of the "Romanness" of the *Fasti*.

On "Augustan" vs. "Anti-Augustan," see especially D. F. Kennedy, "'Augustan' and 'Anti-Augustan': Reflections on Terms of Reference" (in A. Powell (ed.), *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*

(London, 1992), pp. 26–58). Diverse approaches to Ovid’s “Augustanism” or the lack thereof are found in J. C. McKeown, “*Fabula proposita nulla tegenda meo*: Ovid’s *Fasti* and Augustan Politics” (in T. Woodman and D. West (eds.), *Poetry and Politics in the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 169–87), A. Wallace-Hadrill, “Time for Augustus: Ovid, Augustus and the *Fasti*” (in M. Whitby, P. Hardie, and M. Whitby (eds.), *Homo Viator: Classical Essays for John Bramble* (Bristol, 1987), pp. 221–30), F. Millar, “Ovid and the *Domus Augusta*: Rome Seen from Tomoi” (*Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 1–17), A. Barchiesi, *The Poet and the Prince: Ovid and the Augustan Discourse* (Berkeley, 1997; in Italian 1994), and G. D. Williams, “Politics in Ovid” (in W. J. Dominik, J. Garthwaite, and P. A. Roche (eds.), *Writing Politics in Imperial Rome* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 203–24).

The classic discussion of Ovid’s mockery of Augustus’ marriage laws is W. Stroh, “Ovids Liebeskunst und die Ehegesetze des Augustus” (*Gymnasium* 86 (1979): 323–52); see also Davis, *Fictus adulter*, pp. 45–56 and R. Gibson’s commentary on *Ars* 3, pp. 25–37, the latter with useful documentation of the *lex Iulia* itself. The latest treatment of Ovid’s presentation of his relationship to Augustus in the exile poems is M. M. McGowan’s *Ovid in Exile: Power and Poetic Redress in the Tristia and Epistulae ex Ponto* (Leiden, 2009). On the general problem of how to read ancient panegyric, compare F. Ahl, “The Art of Safe Criticism in Ancient Greece and Rome” (*American Journal of Philology* 105 (1084): 174–2008); specifically on panegyric in Ovid, see S. Hinds, ‘Generalising about Ovid’ (*Ramus* 16 (1987): 4–31; repr. in *Oxford Readings*, pp. 15–50), section 3 (“The Passive Panegyricist”).

Reception

Discussions of different aspects of Ovid’s reception through the ages can be found in Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled*, chapters 11 and 12, and in two edited volumes, C. Martindale (ed.), *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1988) and W. S. Anderson (ed.), *Ovid: The Classical Heritage* (New York, 1995), as well as in various chapters in the three Companions. S. A. Brown, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: From Chaucer to Ted Hughes* (London, 1999) is specifically concerned with the influence of the *Metamorphoses*, as is Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*. W. Stroh, *Ovid im Urteil der Nachwelt: Eine Testimoniensammlung* (Darmstadt, 1969) is a charming collection of opinions of Ovid from antiquity to the 20th century.

On Ovid in the Middle Ages, see R. J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum* (Munich, 1986) and his chapter "Ovid in the Middle Ages: Exile, Mythographer, and Lover" (*Brill Companion*, pp. 413–42). The rebuke to the jealous priest has been edited by W. Wattenbach in *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 2 (1877): 398–9. The text of, and commentary on, the *Love Council of Remiremont* can be found in C. Oulmont, *Les Débats du clerc et du chevalier dans la littérature poétique du moyen-âge* (Geneva, 1974). *Carmina Burana* 105 is discussed in A. G. Elliott, "The Bedraggled Cupid: Ovidian Satire in *Carmina Burana* 105" (*Traditio* 37 (1981): 426–37); compare also P. G. Walsh, *Love Lyrics from the Carmina Burana* (Chapel Hill, 1993), pp. 132–6.

Generally on the influence of Ovid on Renaissance and Baroque art, see Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, P. Barolsky, *As in Ovid, So in Renaissance Art* (*Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 451–74), C. Allen, "Ovid and Art" (*Cambridge Companion*, pp. 336–67), and M. Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods* (Oxford, 2005). Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* is discussed by C. Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (London, 1997), pp. 55–65. For Correggio's *Io*, see especially M. Fabiański, *Correggio's Erotic Poesie* (Cracow, 1998); J. C. Nash, *Veiled Images: Titian's Mythological Paintings for Philip II* (Philadelphia, 1985) discusses the picture of Diana and Actaeon in the context of Titian's other Ovidian paintings.

The "Ovid novels" discussed in chapter 8 are D. Wishart, *Ovid* (London, 1985), J. Alison, *The Love-Artist* (New York, 2001), J. Skvorecki, *An Inexplicable Story, or The Narrative of Questus Firmus Siculus* (Toronto, 2002; in Czech 2002), V. Horia, *God Was Born in Exile* (New York, 1961; in French 1960), D. Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (New York, 1978), and Christoph Ransmayr, *The Last World: A Novel with an Ovidian Repertory* (New York, 1990; in German 1988). For a discussion of all these, and on the reception of Ovid in the 20th and 21st centuries in general, see T. Ziolkowski's magisterial *Ovid and the Moderns* (Ithaca, 2005) or, for a shorter version, his "Ovid in the Twentieth Century" (*Blackwell Companion*, pp. 455–68). The most recent Ovid novel of which I am aware is B. K. Jaro, *Betray the Night* (Mundelein, IL, 2009). Not a novel, but a short story well worth reading is A. Tabucchi's "Dream of Publius Ovidius Naso, Poet and Courtier" in the author's *Dreams of Dreams and The Last Three Days of Fernando Pessoa* (San Francisco, 1999; in Italian 1992), pp. 13–15, on which see the insightful article by J. F. Miller, "Tabucchi's Dream of Ovid" (*Literary Imagination* 3 (2001): 237–47).

Notes

- 1 L. Traube, *Einleitung in die lateinische Philologie des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1911), p. 113.
- 2 S. Hinds, "Generalising about Ovid" (*Ramus* 16 (1987): 4–31); repr. in P. E. Knox (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Ovid* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 15–50.
- 3 G. B. Conte, *Genres and Readers: Lucretius, Love Elegy, Pliny's Encyclopedia* (Baltimore, 1994), p. 123.
- 4 T. Stoppard, *The Invention of Love* (London, 1997), p. 13.
- 5 D. F. Kennedy, "The Epistolary Mode and the First of Ovid's *Heroides*" (*Classical Quarterly* 34 (1984): 413–22); repr. in P. E. Knox (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Ovid* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 69–85.
- 6 J. T. Davis, *Fictus Adulter: Poet as Actor in the Amores* (Amsterdam, 1989), p. 41.
- 7 M. Labate, *L'arte di farsi amare: Modelli culturali e progetto didascalico nell'elegia ovidiana* (Pisa, 1984), pp. 13–64.
- 8 P. Green, *Ovid: The Poems of Exile* (2nd edn., Berkeley, 2005), p. xi.
- 9 R. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars Amatoria, Epistulae ex Ponto, and Epistulae Heroidum* (Munich, 1986), p. 17.
- 10 Quoted from C. Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (London, 1997), p. 55.

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